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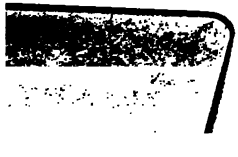
WITH HOOKS OF STEEL

WILLIAM·T·TOWNES



With Hooks of Steel

Fiction. American.

With Hooks of Steel

WITH HOOKS OF STEEL

A Tale of Old-time Virginia

By

WILLIAM T. TOWNES

"Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."
—HAMLET.

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To one, whose discretion has earned for her the right of preeminence in the world of women, whose loyalty has proven the majesty of friendship, and whose love, now at meridian, still sweetens the memories of the altar, this work is dedicated.

WJR 19FEB'36

With Hooks of Steel

CHAPTER I

THE training stables of Staunton Hill were near the foot of the eminence on which the residence stood, and close by was the one mile oval training track, lying in the adjoining nearly level low grounds of the river. Sand mixed with the alluvial soil made the track "lightning fast," as they say, and quick to dry out after rains.

According to his daily custom, Colonel Maclin went to the training stables early on a certain bright morning of August, 185—, to "try-out" his good chestnut gelding Timekeeper, by imported Fylde, against his justly celebrated four-year-old bay mare Nellie, by Planet. Nellie had an unbeaten record on the tracks of several Southern States. Dozens of races had she won for Colonel Maclin, her breeder and owner; and thousands of dollars had she earned

for him. So, if Timekeeper could take up weight for age and keep step with her, he would prove a valuable racing asset in the Staunton Hill string of horses during the coming season.

"Abram," said the Colonel, "are Nellie and Timekeeper both doing good? Are they on their feed? And are they ready now to show their best?"

No slave ever enjoyed a greater measure of his master's confidence than did Unc' Abram, that patient, peace-loving, faithful old slave at Staunton Hill. His services were next to indispensable as trainer of the stables, where valuable thoroughbred horses were bred and developed for the running turf. There was a quiet air of earnestness about the old man that bespoke integrity in all that he thought, said, or did. Whether it was a look, a word, or a gesture, a certain courteous dignity graced his bearing; and his associates absorbed the respectability of the atmosphere about him.

"Yes, sir, Marster," was his answer to the Colonel's question, "dey's all right."

"Then, since both have been given plenty of work to make them fit, weight them according to age, and we will try them out. I have been offered a fancy price for Nellie and I am thinking of accepting it. She's to be used only as a brood mare, though. I want to 'try out'

Timekeeper with her again. We know she has won all her races handily, and any horse that can finish near her at a mile and a half will be about good enough to beat all competitors during the coming season."

"What, Marster; you ain't a-gwine to sell Nellie, sholy! She done won you thousands o' money evvy time she start. She been good to you."

"Yes, Abram, I know that; but if Timekeeper proves as good as I think he is, I will let the mare go for the big price offered. But only for breeding purposes, of course."

"Well, well," groaned the old slave, "if I had my way dat filly would die right here! *Nobody* would ever own a ha'r off 'er but you, Marster."

Soon the two horses were led from their stalls, with shiny-black piccaninnies in the saddles.

"Now, boys," enjoined Colonel Maclin, "this is an important trial of these horses. Make no mistakes. Listen to me! Listen carefully, I say! Gallop once and a half around the course, head and head, quietly. Let your horses break on even terms, head and head, at the half mile pole. Take just enough hold of their mouths to steady them, and let them run the first mile on their courage. But let them run! Steady them, but let them run! Then ride them out strong the remaining half mile.

Now, you understand? The trial will be a mile and a half."

"Yes, sir,"—*sotto voce.*

The horses were cantered once and a half around the course. They broke well together at the half mile pole. On they came like a pair tied together; then to the judge's stand, head and head, the first half mile. On they went together the first mile to the point where they at first broke; still together; then the mare, quicker to respond to her rider's whip, suddenly leaped a length in front. But the gelding, game and ambitious, hung on under urging, and both came to the head of the stretch in the same position,—the mare a length in front and that advantage gained unawares to Timekeeper and his boy. Both boys were heel and hand, riding vigorously. Down the stretch the horses came without change of positions; and, under shake of the whip the mare won by a length and a half. Timekeeper had proved his worth to the satisfaction of Colonel Maclin.

"Now, Abram," enquired the Colonel, "is that about the way they finished in their trial last week?"

"Yes, sir! jus' de same. De filly always beats de colt by from one and a half to two lengths, when dey goes a mile and uppards. Dey's done dat for me time an' agin, sir. Dey ain't no doubt erbout it. Dat's jus' de size of

'em both, sir. De mare is always jus' de leas' little bit de bes'."

"Well, I will let the filly go for a broodmare. She will never race again."

"Yes, sir. But, Marster, how you know de man gwine to keep his word for dat?"

"Oh, as to that, I will be careful, Abram. The contract will be drawn up in writing, witnessed, and executed in due form."

"You ain' never gwine have another one as good as she is, Marster—an'—an'—den, too, she knows evvybody here; an' she seems to kinter feel dat she's a member of de fam'ly like; she's jus' as sot in 'er ways as can be, an' she talks jus' de same as anybody else, jus' like sho' nuff folks."

"Oh, Abram, you are too sentimental. Timekeeper will improve with age, and we'll have a first class horse in him after a while."

"Marster, dat ain't it; we's *got* a good one *now;* an' den, she's got sich powerful winnin' ways 'bout 'er. I don' never go 'bout 'er widout 'er talkin' to me, an' tellin' me how she feels, an' axin' me sumfen. Marster, I jus' natchally loves de mare; she's like folks, an' folks of de fam'ly, too. Don't let 'er go, Marster!" The old man's voice wavered with suppressed emotion.

"I *must* sell the mare, Abram," replied the Master; "exigencies demand it."

"Who, Marster?" in an indignant tone, sharply emphasizing "who."

"Exigencies, I said."

"An' dem's de same gentses, I 'spec's, dat off-ficialed you outer runnin' 'er in de stake race at Raleigh las' spring, arter she was entered reg'lar an' de race was at her mercy. I declar', what is things a-comin' to nex'? Marster, I wouldn't sell dis filly, no matter what dey say."

"Abram, you don't understand. I can't explain to you. I am selling the mare for business reasons."

"Oh," replied the old trainer, understanding now, and seeing the helplessness of the situation. "Yes, sir; I sees; but, sir,—Marster, why n't you sell some of dese here no 'count, triflin', good-for-nothin' niggers 'bout here, instead of de mare? De mare is some account, an' she's de same as a member of de fam'ly."

"I never sold one of my negroes in my life, Abram; and I never will,—so long as they behave themselves. To do so is beneath a gentleman."

"Well, den, Nellie and me mus' part," muttered the old man, in a low voice, and shaking his head.

Seeing that no argument of his could save Nellie, the old trainer soon went into the stall at the farther end of the shed, and stayed there,

assisting in the "rubbing out" of Nellie, until Colonel Maclin had mounted his horse and ridden away from the Staunton Hill training stables.

CHAPTER II

JUST across Staunton river, opposite Colonel Maclin's home was the Broadcastle estate of the Meltons, with its enormous acreage of hills and low-grounds. The roads were all in order, the fences were clean of briars and bushes, and the buildings were all perfect in the appointments of that day. The residence stood in the midst of towering oaks,—the glory of the hills around. This home had been noted for hospitality through several generations; and Mr. James Strang Melton, the present Master of Broadcastle, was not out of line with the family tradition. It was his pleasure to entertain with a lavish hospitality. But this is not here counted as one of his special virtues; for was not that a common characteristic of every established family in the good old days of Virginia's prosperity?

Mr. Melton was a lawyer,—a "corn-field" lawyer, as a United States Senator recently declared himself to be, citing dozens of the

ablest Southern statesmen of the past century who had been country attorneys like himself. Practicing in the highest courts of his state, Mr. Melton would also appear in the magistrate courts of his county when a poor, unfortunate wretch, caught in the meshes of the legal net, pleaded with him for his services. But the lawyer gave most of his time to his farm and his own financial affairs.

Colonel Maclin, after leaving his stables on that fine August morning, crossed the river in the flat boat, propelled by a negro man with a long pole, to visit Mr. Melton at Broadcastle. As usual, he took his young son, Stuart, with him to visit the Melton children, Dean and Mary.

"It gives me pleasure to welcome you to Broadcastle, Colonel!" was the lawyer's greeting, as the two old gentlemen took chairs on the front porch, that commanded the sloping lawn where the three children stood grouped in happy comradeship.

"And it gives me no less pleasure to have the privilege of your company, my dear sir," replied the visitor.

"I heartily congratulate you, Colonel, on the success of your candidacy for the State Senate."

"I thank you, Mr. Melton."

"This county is very close between the

Democrats and Whigs. It seems as nearly balanced as the two horses in the stable of our friend Goode. He declares they are so close together in their trials against each other that if one horse is given the extra weight of his stable-door key, he is defeated by the other."

"Yes, the county vote is indeed close. I believe it was the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, who wrote that a hair perhaps divides the false and true. At any rate, a hair seems to divide the two parties in this county. Whenever it is brushed the wrong way the other party wins." Colonel Maclin's reply explained why he had won in the close political contest.

"Then, too, you had the active opposition of the old Democratic war-horse, Nath Pugh. Nath is a most effective campaign orator. He tore his shirt off, so to speak, several times on the stump."

The Colonel chuckled as he replied:

"And he tore up history and grammar quite as often. At the Christiansville barbecue last week after I had spoken an hour or more, with all the rhetoric and logic at my command, extolling the Whig party and citing Mr. Webster as authority for several of my statements, I closed my speech, thinking that I had the crowd with me. But then I had reckoned without the host of the party. Old Nath followed me with *his* speech. His first outburst was

something like this: 'Whar was your Daniel Webster when Jackson fit in mud and blood up to his crotch at the battle of New Orleans? I'll tell you whar he was,—away down in Massachusetts, a-writin' of a spellin' book.' "

The Colonel and Mr. Melton laughed heartily.

"Poor old Nath!" sympathetically remarked Mr. Melton; "he isn't half bad as a matter-of-fact exponent of demagogy, or of Democracy."

"I had 'Kiah Pugh to contend with, too,—in the Bluestone district," said the Colonel.

"He is an ignorant old fellow. But he has a center-shot way of shooting off his mouth. He seems to send his commonplace comments directly to the hearts of his countrymen. And then, too, he is full of energy. He's a worker among his kind; a busy old bee and a rank partisan. But he's superstitious. He believes in witches and all that tomfoolery about their transforming people into animals, and then riding them to death while they are asleep. The common belief is that as soon as the transformed person is able to speak the witches leave off their deviltry and scamper away."

"Ha! ha!! ha!!!" laughed the Colonel, as he nearly bent himself double. "That reminds me of a little incident of a few weeks ago. I rode up to his house on Bluestone and halloed. Soon he came ambling down the walk from the

house, walking like he was half dead. I saluted as he touched the latch of the gate.

" 'How are you, Mr. Pugh?' I said. 'Feeling well enough, I hope, to assure me that you intend to vote for me.'

" 'Was you ever agin Jackson?' he inquired in a weak voice, never looking up at me at all, nor even saying 'Howdy.'

" 'Well, yes,' I replied; 'I did vote against him once. But that was in my infancy, so to speak.'

" 'Well, then, I'm agin you," was his positive reply. 'But I'm feelin' too bad to-day to discuss p'ints with you. I'm hardly able to be about.'

" 'Why, what's the matter with you, Mr. Pugh? I thought you looked badly as you came down the walk.'

" 'See that big hill over thar beyant the branch?' he questioned, pointing.

" 'Yes,' I replied, in an interested, inquiring tone.

" 'Well, they come las' night, and rid me thar,—this time a-ridin' of me in the shape of a bull yearlin',' piped his thin voice.

" 'What did?' I inquired.

" 'The witches,'—looking back as he replied, probably fearing they might still be near enough to overhear.

" 'You show the effects of some rough treat-

ment,' I assured him. 'You look haggard, jaded, careworn,—positively wretched. Never saw you seem so bad off before. Did they do you up?'

" 'Well, ya'as, so to speak, they did. They had me agoin' some las' night. From that tall pine tree you see thar, beyant the three oaks, on t'uther side the field, they rid me, whip an' spur, lickety split, cross rock piles an' brier patches, logs an' stumps, up hill an' down, here you go, an' thar you go,—like hell a-beatin' tan bark,—'twell we come to that wide, deep gully you see on t'uther side the field; an' when we got thar I was a-goin' so fast I couldn't stop. I just 'spected to break my neck. But, as I said, I couldn't stop in time, without a'fallin' in head-over-heels an' a-breakin' my neck. So I just gethered myself together, I did, and give a mighty jump. Over I went, clear an' clean; but it s'prised me so when I looked back that I just give a grunt, and I says to myself, I did, "That's a hell of a jump for a bull yearlin'." Well, sir, they was gone, like that,—puff!' And the old fellow hissed a half grunt through his lips.

" 'But, Mr. Pugh,' I said, 'you don't really believe in that, do you?'

" 'Look at these,' was his answer, holding up his fingers. 'You see all that red dirt where they galloped me last night, on all fours?'

"The red dirt was there all right, under his finger nails, in rolls,—almost enough to sprout a crop of peas."

"What a fool!" said Mr. Melton, choking with laughter.

"Well, well,—I sometimes wonder which the world has the most of,—knaves or fools?" said the Colonel, proceeding to fill his pipe.

Mr. Melton took from his pocket a Powhatan clay pipe, red, hard-burnt, smoothly glazed, and shapely, with figwood stem,—a beauty. He filled it with tobacco,—home-raised from imported Havana seed,—and soon the two old gentlemen were puffing away, enjoying the best smoke to be got from tobacco, as they sat in a kind of social séance that only the old-crony pipe smokers can enjoy.

"As between the knaves and fools," replied Mr. Melton, "I believe the knaves have it. Before the count could be completed one-half the fools would go over to the knaves. That would give the knaves at least a constitutional majority. They do about what they please with the body politic,—in fact with things generally. So many of the good men are either constitutionally lazy, or naturally fools. The knaves hang together until they are hanged."

"Oh, while I think of it, Mr. Melton, I want to ask whether you know a man by the name of Sparks? Colonel Sparks he is called. I

met him,—or rather, he met me,—at the Court House a few days ago, and I agreed to consider the acceptance of his offer to purchase my race mare, Nellie."

"No, Colonel, I don't know him; but I have heard of his presence in this community. I understand he is a fine dresser, and is adjudged a man of considerable means. He is from Georgia, I believe. He and Colonel Axton had a sky-high game of poker at Buffalo Springs last summer, I heard. He beat Axton finally out of something like twenty thousand dollars."

"Then he is a gambler?" passively questioned the Colonel. "But,—well,—maybe not. He may be a gentleman of means, thirsty for excitement. I met him on his own initiative and he made me a most liberal offer for Nellie, to be used as a brood mare,—solely as a brood mare. He wants to send her to England to be bred to some noted sire."

"Have you decided to accept his offer?"

"Well, yes; I have about decided to do so. But Abram seems distressed to death over it. The old man is positively childish about that mare."

"How about Timekeeper, Colonel? Is he showing up good?"

"Fine. Nellie is the only horse in three states that can trim him, weight for age. She

always beats him in their trials; but very little. The difference between them is so slight that I know I shall still have a dependable horse when she goes to the stud."

"Well, you know, 'accidents will happen, even in the best regulated families'. That is especially true in the case of horses. If, however, you can get a fancy price for her, why, probably, it would be just as well to let her go."

"That is my opinion, sir. So I'll sell her to Sparks, and let her go to England."

"It seems a pity, though, to let such an animal leave Virginia. Her speed and courage are only second in importance to her wonderful powers of endurance over long distances, and she has plenty of size for an ideal producer. Through her produce she would hold the racing honors of America for Virginia, where they have remained since the days of that noble sportsman, Washington."

Mr. Melton, like every good Virginian of his day, felt a deep sense of pride in his state's taking the lead in turf honors, as well as in her unequalled record for supplying Presidents to the Union.

"I believe she would surely produce worthy successors. But, unfortunately, I'm compelled to raise money enough to pay for some property that I have bought in the West."

"Oh, Colonel, do not sell the mare for any

such trivial reason. My check book and my personal endorsement are both at your command."

"My dear sir, I must apologize for declining to accept your offer. Years ago I firmly resolved never to borrow money. I imagine I sleep better without the worries of debt hanging over me, like the sword of Damocles. But, sir, I again apologize for declining; had I to accept a challenge to mortal combat, I should know where to come for advice and assistance. Your generous offer is but the sign and the seal of the true friendship between us."

"Your rule, Colonel, puts you out of line with the custom of our State."

"Very true, sir; and I apologize for declining. However, that does not make me any the less ready to do for others what I will not accept for myself."

CHAPTER III

DURING the two years after the sale of Nellie to the Georgian Colonel Maclin's Timekeeper won race after race in Virginia, and in North and South Carolina. In fact, he was beaten only twice in the two seasons,—once when he had traveled through rain and mud a long distance on two successive days prior to his starting, and once when the jockey misunderstood his riding orders. Therefore, Colonel Maclin's confidence in the horse remained unshaken.

On the 4th of July, the second year after the sale of Nellie, Timekeeper ran at the old Twin Oaks course in Mecklenburg, beating Dr. Sim's horse Trenton by four lengths handily at two miles. Trenton was a local celebrity, and the Doctor and the Colonel had up a good stiff jack-pot on the result. There was a large, enthusiastic crowd present at the course, many having come from distant parts of Virginia and North Carolina to see the contest.

After the race a stranger, well dressed and with all the courtly grace of the old-time gentleman, came up to Colonel Maclin, introducing himself as Mr. Benson, of Tennessee, and asked for a price on Timekeeper.

"The horse is not for sale, sir," replied the Colonel.

"Wouldn't you take five thousand for him, Colonel Maclin?"

"No, sir; I value the horse higher than you do. You can't buy him. Why should I sell him? He can beat any horse owned in Virginia, or in North or South Carolina."

"It is well for you that you specified the States. Probably you are right as to Virginia and the Carolinas; but how about Tennessee, Colonel?"

"Or Tennessee either," was the tart reply.

"For how much will you back him, Colonel? You have a useful horse; nothing more. He is not a great horse, according to my judgment. He lacks a lot of being a great horse; but he is useful to win certain kinds of races."

"Sir, you can't change my opinion of this horse by your disparagement of him. I repeat, —he is not for sale. And as for your bantering words, asking me 'How much?' I will say for your curiosity,—and I believe it will prove for you curiosity solely,—that I leave the naming of the amount to you. Is your curiosity now

satisfied? Are you a trifler, or do you mean business?"

"Business, sir, business, since you seem to question my veracity," sharply replied Benson. "If you yourself are not a trifler, you can cover ten thousand dollars against just that amount, which I now happen to have in my possession. I will bring my horse from Tennessee and run her against your Timekeeper on next Thanksgiving day,—the last Thursday in November,—at this track, two miles,—the same distance as run to-day; winner to take the purse; scale weights, play or pay."

"That suits me, Mr. Benson. I accept your own terms; meet me at the Exchange Hotel at nine o'clock to-night, and we will put up and shut up. There must be a written agreement of terms and conditions. Did you say 'play or pay'?"

"Yes, Colonel, I said just that. There will, therefore, be no room for you to lose through any shuffle on my part."

The Colonel and Benson met at the Exchange Hotel as arranged, and the money, together with a signed copy of the agreement, was left in a sealed packet in the hands of the clerk of the County Court,—a friend of Colonel Maclin's and a man of unimpeachable character.

Unc' Abram had become much attached to

Timekeeper. The match with Benson greatly elated the old man, and he neglected nothing necessary to keep the horse in good condition. The old trainer of the stables slept in the horse's stall every night, watched every one that went about him, sifted with his own hands every grain of oats given to him, shook up and beat out the dust from his hay before feeding him, kept fresh water by him all the time, made up the stall bedding himself twice a day; in short, he watched over the horse as tenderly as a fond mother would guard her young babe.

About the middle of October, six weeks before the date for the race, Mr. Benson arrived in the neighborhood with his Tennessee horse, —a black mare, aged, name withheld. The conditions did not require the name to be given. Benson was to bring a horse; that was all, except that the horse should be one owned by himself and at that time located in Tennessee. These requirements were to be satisfied by sworn statements of public officials of Tennessee, under official signatures and seals, and were to be presented to the presiding judge of the course on the day of the race. Benson located his stabling and training quarters until the day of the race at Mr. Avery's place,—a Staunton river farm just below Broadcastle on the opposite side of the river from Staunton Hill. The river lowlands were incomparably

better than any other soil of the county for both galloping and fast work. There were straight stretches of level, firm, sandy roadway, miles in length, that afforded excellent facilities for tightening up a horse.

The training quarters consisted of a hewn log cabin with stick-and-dirt chimney, and with a roof of riven boards, three feet long. This housed the trainer, his helper, and the piccaninny jockey. For the horse there was a stable of hewn pine log, the cracks between chinked and daubed, but with openings left for air on the south side toward the river. The two buildings were probably forty yards from each other, on the highest point of the high rising hills that skirted the river as far as the eye could reach, and in the midst of tall pines that carpeted the earth with a thick mat of their annual moult of leafy needles. Lower down the hill a dense growth of oak, dogwood, and scrubby what-not made an ideal cover for wild "varments."

Curiosity became intense in that section of the county about the strange mare, brought all the way from Tennessee to run for a twenty thousand dollar purse against Timekeeper, the invincible,—the pride of southern Virginia.

Pride is the most intense characteristic of the human heart; the head seems to play no part in the drama when pride takes the lead-

ing rôle. Family pride, personal pride, state, county, or village pride,—any one of these, when it involves a contest of merit, will work up an intense excitement in any community, and will sometimes produce results that reflect on the sanity of that same community.

"So the stranger thinks he can come all the way from Tennessee and down us, does he?" "We shall see." These and similar remarks could be heard in almost every gathering, at church, at crossroad stores, or at social entertainments in upper Mecklenburg.

Meanwhile Benson was going about the county and section, quietly taking every even bet that was offered by any prideful citizen.

The strange black mare had been seen several times at exercise on the public ferry road. The concensus of expert opinion favored her conformation,—so identical with that of the great race mare Nellie, who had been regarded by local admirers as the greatest race horse the world had ever seen. Colonel Maclin and Mr. Melton had both seen the strange black mare at exercise on the ferry road. They both saw her resemblance in conformation to the great bay mare Nellie, now in England.

When Unc' Abram saw her galloping on the road, he began to mutter to himself in disconnected sentences. "Jus' like 'er! for de worl' de same. Look at dat lef' fo' foot! jus'

look at it, it turns out when she lif' it up, gallopin'! Well, well, if dat don't beat all! I declar' to God, if de ghos' of Nellie ain't done come back! An' she shape like 'er, too. Dat's a race mare, sho an' p'intly, an' I knows it." Unc' Abram was speaking to himself as the mare galloped past him on the ferry road.

The old man went on to the ferry, having been sent to Broadcastle that morning by the Master of Staunton Hill to look at a thoroughbred yearling colt owned by Mr. Melton, for which a sale was pending between the two old gentlemen. Unc' Abram could but mention to the ferryman the similarity between the strange black mare and the famous bay Nellie. And the ferryman took pleasure in mentioning Unc' Abram's comments to every one that crossed in his boat.

By repetition the old trainer's remarks were noised about, and after a short time many persons were quoting the words in such a way as to lead to the inference that the black mare was the bay Nellie. It was young Stuart Maclin who brought this gossip to his father's ears. The Colonel, with Stuart close at his heels, went down to the stables to question Abram.

"Marster," said the old slave, "I knows it's foolishness, but somehow or other I believe she's Nellie. She shape like 'er; she gollop like 'er; an' she throws her head up, sideways like,

jus' de same, grabbin' de bit an' champin' it jus' de same—de very same."

"You are wrong this time, Abram," replied Colonel Maclin. "I had a letter only a month ago from Mr. Sparks telling me that Nellie had a bay, weanling filly foal by an English stallion. She is still in England, he says, at some noted breeding stud near Newmarket. You must be careful how you make statements, Abram. Mr. Benson would take your life if such remarks came to his ears; and I don't know but that he would have the right to shoot you on sight."

"But, Marster, dat wouldn't keep de strange mare from bein' Nellie."

"Oh, you still think she is a 'ringer,' do you?"

"Marster, if dat ain't Nellie, it's her ghos', sho'."

"You are simply mistaken, Abram, that's all there is to it. Couldn't be she by any chance." And with hurried steps the Colonel left the stable and climbed toward the house, his mind possessed of a new thought. The library was his destination. Going to the shelf section where his old volumes of curious lore were standing in serried ranks, and running his finger slowly along the line of titles, reading them with hurried glance, his finger stopped on "Mason's Scientific Horse Book." Taking the volume out, he opened it and scanned the

index; turning to page 158 he read the following words:

"Take an equal quantity of quick-lime and litarge and boil them in fresh water; what swims at top is fit for use, and will answer expectations; what hairs you anoint with it in the evening will be black the next morning."

"Unless Sparks and Benson are the most unmitigated scoundrels," he said to himself, "this foolish rumor is all bosh. I don't believe there is any cause for alarm. The similarity between the two mares is simply a coincidence. Yet, if there is a trick, I am already beaten. Nellie can beat Timekeeper; that is certain. If I had sufficient evidence, I would confront Benson and accuse him. But even if I could prove that he had deceived me, I could not prove collusion between him and Sparks. Benson could not be held responsible, *per se,* for promises Sparks made to me. I regret that I had any dealings with Sparks or with Benson. I will go and talk again with Abram." He went back to the stables immediately.

"Abram," said the Colonel, "do you believe the strange mare is Nellie?"

"I'm jus' as sho' of it, Marster, as I is I'm a'livin', an', yit, jus' as I's been a-tellin' young Marster here, how could Nellie change 'er color so? Horses don't change dey color, 'ceptin' 'tis a gray horse turns to a white one

when he gits ole. Sumfen's wrong somewhars, for dat's de same mare."

"Did you see any other mark, or sign, that helped you to your conclusion?"

"No, sir, Marster; but I seed enough, dough, to satisfy me. If I could git to 'er in 'er stable I could tell in a minit by a sign I could swar to, 'ceptin' she done forgot her ole habits."

"How so?"

"Well, sir, she had a funny way when I hilt out my han' to 'er of mumblin' over it wid 'er lips. You members, young Marster," he turned to the boy who stood attentively listening. "I ain't never seen nairy nuther horse do it de same as she did. I could sw'ar to 'er by dat on de darkes' night dat ever come; an' I wouldn't want to see 'er nuther at de time she was a-mumblin'. I'd know 'er for a fac', sho'."

"There is no way of testing her in that way. It would never do for you to go about her, nor to ask Benson's people anything about her. If it is Nellie, then I am the loser. I'll try to take the loss as philosophically as possible; but twenty thousand dollars is a fortune. The ten thousand dollars I put up represents about a wagon-load of money. I shall be seriously hurt by this loss, if loss it proves in the end. After all, the mare may not be Nellie. And, Stuart," the Colonel's manner was very stern,

"I wish you to understand that all this gossip must cease."

He walked slowly away from the stable, reflecting,—dejected and worried. The old slave watched him all the way up the hill, as he leisurely strolled toward the house.

"I sho' feels sorry for Marster. Dem scounderls done cotch 'im. If he lose de bet, he talk like it'll break 'im. Low-down thieves! I wish I had dey heads in a halter! I'd swing 'em up an' show 'em no mercy."

For several days the Colonel did not go out of his house. Abram missed his presence at the stables each morning, and at the expiration of a week the old slave came to the house asking for "Marster."

"Is you feelin' bad, Master? Is you po'ly, sir?" inquired the old man.

"Well, yes, Abram, I'm not well. This trouble, I'm afraid, is too much for me at my time of life. But I'll try to pull through it all right. Do the best you can, old man, and don't say a word. Make no complaints about anything. Keep quiet. A still tongue and a wise head go together. I'm about convinced we are caught; but I am not sure. There is a bare chance in our favor. Our surmises may be wrong."

"Yes, sir, but if I sees any way in dis worl', Marster,——" But the rest remained unsaid.

"Well, have Timekeeper good and fit Thursday week,—Thanksgiving day,—that's all you've got to do. Stop thinking about anything else, Abram. Keep your mind on what you know you've got to do, and do it right. That's all." The Master dismissed the old slave from his presence, waving him off as he spoke.

Still the Colonel moped and stayed in the house; and Abram confided to Stuart how lonely the stables seemed without the master.

One week before the day of the race Mr. Burnett, a neighbor and friend of Colonel Maclin's, rode up to Staunton Hill and asked to see him.

"Colonel, have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Why, the strange mare you were to run against next week is dead."

"Dead? Dead?" exclaimed the Colonel, with amazement pictured on his face.

"Yes, sir; some one shot her last night just after midnight. A gun was poked through the crack in the logs of her stable, and she was shot dead,—almost instantly."

"Too bad! Too bad!" The Colonel was shocked. "This is simply too diabolical an act for a respectable community. I will give a thousand dollars to catch and convict the per-

petrator. Is there any clue as to the guilty party, do they say?"

"They say not," replied Burnett. "The trainer of the mare heard the shot, jumped from his bed, and rushed to the scene; but he could not see any one, nor hear any sound, except the struggles of the dying mare."

"Too bad, too bad!" repeated the Colonel. "I will immediately go and see poor Benson, and tell him I am unwilling to profit by his misfortune. Each of us must take down his original part of the purse, although, under the terms of the wager, I have won the whole. It was 'play or pay,' and Benson, poor fellow, can't 'play' now. I wonder what Abram will say."

Stuart was, as usual, in friendly conference with Unc' Abram when the Colonel reached the training stables.

"You've heard the news, Abram?" he asked.

"Marster, I 'clar' to God it's de Han' of de Lord. Dem low-down thieves couldn' 'spec' de Lord to prosper 'em to win dat race wid our Nellie," was the fervent old man's sole comment, as he threw an angry look at the boy, and continued his duties in silence.

Within an hour after hearing the news Colonel Maclin halted his saddle horse at the Benson stable-quarters across the river where

the fine mare had been so brutally slain. Standing at the door of the stable were the mare's colored trainer, his helper, the jockey, and several men and boys that lived on the farm; and over their heads the visitor could see inside the stable Benson and some one else working around the dead animal. When the Colonel called, Benson squeezed through the bystanders who filled the stable door and came out, with coat off, sleeves rolled up, and hands bloody.

"Mr. Benson," said the Colonel, "one of my neighbors told me this morning of your misfortune, and I came over immediately to see you and to offer my services. The murderer of your mare should be detected and punished. Have you any clue to work on?"

"None whatever," Benson replied, without looking up. "It must have been an interested party, and I haven't yet——"

"The ferryman told me when I crossed the river half an hour ago that some one crossed over and came back with his canoe last night after eleven o'clock. He was up until about eleven. His canoe was chained and locked to the end of the ferry boat when he left the boat at 10:30. This morning he found it gone, the lock broken and the canoe not in sight; in a search along the river bank he found it, fully a quarter of a mile down the river, tied to a

tree on the opposite side of the river from here. The person who used the canoe may have been the perpetrator of this miserable, contemptible murder."

"Probably so," replied Benson. "If I could guess who the party is I'd shoot him on sight. Couldn't have been anybody but an interested party."

"Probably so," replied the Colonel, in the same words and tone as Benson had employed. "Did you have any private bets on your mare with any person in this part of the county?"

"Yes, I had several; but none of them were more than two hundred dollars. My principal loss was with you, and I haven't——"

The Colonel cut him short: "Oh, Mr. Benson, so far as that goes, don't let that disturb you! You have lost enough in losing your valuable mare. We will call our wager 'off'; you will not lose a cent of that money. I would never accept a cent of your money under the present unfortunate circumstances."

Benson looked up into the Colonel's face for the first time since his arrival.

"Sir, I'll be very glad to get the money back," he said. "But, by the Eternal!" using the favorite exclamation of his political patron saint of Tennessee—"by the Eternal," he repeated, "if I succeed in tracing and locating the bloody murderer, I'll cut his heart out of

him, if it costs me my life,—the sneaking, cowardly thief and murderer!"

"It was a diabolical act, Mr. Benson. I'll give five hundred dollars myself to have him detected and punished as he deserves. But when can you go to the Court House? I'm ready to release the money you put up on the race."

"To-morrow. To-morrow at twelve o'clock I will be there, if agreeable to you."

"Then I will meet you at twelve."

CHAPTER IV

SIX years passed.

Three students,—Stuart Maclin, Kirkman Acee, and Dean Melton,—were returning to their rooms from the post-office at Hampden Sidney College.

Stuart Maclin, the Colonel's son, a young man of most engaging manner, kindly and genial, had acquitted himself with distinction and was about to receive the Bachelor's degree at the nearly approaching Commencement of the College. Kirkman Acee, of Mississippi, a rather handsome young man, reserved and taciturn, had won the Debater's Medal of the Jefferson Literary Society, and was ambitious to become a lawyer. Dean Melton,—only son of Mr. James Strang Melton, of Broadcastle, —was just such a youth as a good judge of men would have quickly singled out as likely to make his mark in the world. He was dignified in bearing and was always considerate of the opinions of others.

These three young men were almost inseparable: wherever one was the others were to be

found near by,—mundane Ellen Yards, always in line.

"What I hate, old partner," said Dean, slapping Kirkman on the shoulder, "is the parting with you. Come go home with us when we go! We three can spend the summer together, and have lots of fun, riding around the country, visiting, fishing, and the like.

"I expect they are looking for me down in Mississippi. They'll be counting on my home-coming, I know; but I have a great mind to go with you fellows," declared Acee with fervor.

"Then, why don't you?" urged Stuart. "The Mississippi people can take care of themselves; and you certainly don't need them to take care of you. Who is there to 'hone arter' in that quarter anyway? Is it a girl, Kirkman?"

"No, indeed. There's no one there I care to see particularly; though I would like to meet some of my old friends."

"Say the word now! Oh, come with us!" urged Dean. "I'll write them at home to make allowance for your coming when they send to Scottsburg station for us the last of the week. Now don't say no. All right, that's a good boy! I see from your face that——"

"Yes, I believe I'll go," Kirkman interrupted. "I'll stay awhile,—until you fellows get tired of me."

"Then you'll spend the summer," said Stuart. When they reached Dean's room they lighted their pipes, and the conversation became more serious.

"Have you decided to read law, Kirkman?" inquired Dean.

"Yes, I shall like law, I think."

"It's pretty hard to fight your own battles and other people's too," suggested Dean.

"And then, too," remarked Stuart, "lawyers have so much dirty work to do."

"How so?" inquired Kirkman.

"Why, I should feel ashamed to stand up before a jury of honest men and solemnly declare that my client was innocent when I knew him to be guilty. That would make me, in my own heart, as guilty as the culprit I defended. I could never do that." Stuart spoke with warmth.

"But you haven't looked the matter squarely in the face," Kirkman replied. "The lawyer in defending his client, although he may know him to be guilty of the crime as charged, is yet doing his duty; the law——" But Stuart interrupted him.

"It might be a lawyer's conception of duty, yet I would draw the line at performing such a duty. I just wouldn't do it."

"The law guarantees to every one charged with crime," continued Kirkman, "the right of

trial,—the right to defend himself,—to present as best he may the evidence of his innocence. The jury must judge the evidence under the judge's interpretation of the law. If the poor prisoner cannot have counsel to combat the merciless prosecution of the State's attorney, then he would not have a fair trial. In other words, the lawyer must see that his client, whether innocent or guilty, is protected in his legal rights of fair trial. If I decline to defend my client after he has confessed his guilt to me, in confidence, then I deny to him the right of fair trial on the evidence. The law convicts solely on the evidence. Would you deny the right of fair trial even to a sheep-killing dog? I wouldn't. The right of fair trial is as much a part of the law as the statute of the law that fixes the penalty for the crime. Your conscience is learning to split hairs, Stuart."

"Don't misunderstand my position, Kirkman," replied Stuart. "To deny the accused counsel would deprive him of fair trial, as you contend; and to deny him that would be a crime in itself. But the present methods of dispensing justice are wrong. How can a just judge sit quietly on the bench and allow an overzealous State's attorney to denounce and vilify a helpless prisoner at the bar?—to thrust his own individuality into the case in pronounc-

ing the accused guilty?—to influence the jury by his personal opinion of the evidence? The jury alone should be allowed to express an opinion of that. Why should the State's attorney be allowed to express his personal opinion to influence the jury, and thus take an advantage which no outsider could take without causing a mistrial? This liberty allowed in the present dispensation of justice is brutal, cowardly. Yet it is permitted in nearly every trial in our criminal courts. The judge should permit counsel to state, or restate, evidence not otherwise than fairly. The attorneys should state the evidence fairly and express their conclusions accordingly; this would help the jury to arrive at just conclusions, and so further the ends of justice. But warped statement of evidence and vindictive denunciation and abuse of a helpless prisoner at the bar by a cold-blooded, merciless prosecutor, bent on making a name for himself at the expense of a fellow-man's honor, or life, should be forbidden in our courts of justice."

"Truly and well have you spoken, Stuart," replied Kirkman with mock approval, "but you are exploring technical ground. There are so many artful ways in which the shrewd lawyer can plead his case that I'm afraid the judge who undertook to put in practice the theory you have advanced would find himself in water

deep enough to drown himself. Whether he actually did drown or not would depend on whether his head was light enough to float." Kirkman spoke like a sharp-witted lawyer, conscious of his cunning argument.

"Then study law and get wise enough to educate the lawmakers how to frame statutes that will protect a man's honor until he is actually found guilty by the court," replied Stuart. "Find a way to stop this vilification of an unconvicted prisoner in open court. Find a way to make a lawyer responsible at the bar for reckless accusations not sustained by the evidence! And, too, find a way to put a stop to all this clearing of the guilty through technicalities of the law. Such decisions in the past, splitting up questions into atoms, then dividing atoms by the square of absurdity, have broken down the confidence of the masses in the unvarying dispensation of justice by the courts. Of outraged justice the mob is born."

"I agree with you!" exclaimed Kirkman. "I will see what can be done along the lines you suggest some of these days when I know more about this deep subject,—this technical legal subject,—that we are discussing and, discussing too with all the confidence of judges of the Supreme Court."

"Oh, now, don't shy away from a good, common-sense consideration of every-day evils that

are fit subjects for discussion by every citizen who loves justice," replied Stuart. "And, when you do get wise, look into and remedy also that other blot on the Court records,—that crying outrage against justice,—that permits a detective, or other officer of the law, to search the effects of any one arrested on charge of crime, and to make public through the newspapers all the written secrets unearthed concerning the private life of the accused. I know of several cases where this has been done. And, the accused were innocent,—as was proved on trial,—as innocent as lambs. The information gained by the detectives from private papers of the accused and published in the newspapers was of the most sacred kind. Fully understood it meant no harm to any person or thing; yet by being misrepresented these innocents were slaughtered for life. Isn't that justice for you with a vengeance in this land of Liberty? It is a crying shame. I'm done now! I don't know any law. Don't want to know any. I'm disgusted. Let's change the subject!"

"You speak feelingly, Stuart, as if the strong hand of the law, or the miscarriage of justice, were in some way a menace to you," said Kirkman.

Before Stuart could reply there was a rap at the door, and the colored janitor of the dormitory came in bringing a note to Dean.

"Why, it is from my sister Mary," Dean said. And he read:

"Father and I have just arrived at the Cottage Inn. Do come right over."

CHAPTER V

"KIRKMAN! KIRKMAN!!" called Stuart, shaking his tired friend who lay asleep on the bed, "get up, sleepy-head! Get up! it's about time for us to be going over to the Cottage Inn. Get up!"

But, exhausted by the loss of sleep during the night study for the weeks when they were preparing for final examinations of the college course, Acee opened his eyes scarcely half-way, and dozed off again, while Stuart was brushing up for the visit to the Inn.

"Kirkman! Kirkman, aren't you coming with me?" Stuart shook the sleeper again.

"No, not now," was the half audible reply. "You go on; I'll come later," and the sleeper dropped off again by the time his last word was uttered.

Arriving at the Inn, Stuart found the Melton family party chatting on the front veranda. As Stuart approached nearer, Dean and Mary, who were enjoying between themselves a merry laugh over something, arose and met him at the foot of the steps; while Mr. Melton, smok-

ing his fig-stem Powhatan pipe and leaning back restfully in a broad-bottomed mission chair, hailed him with congratulations.

"Come out on the grass to the cool shade, Mary, and let us talk of old times; come on, Dean," said Stuart, leading the way.

"Well, here we are, and a nice place it is, too," said Dean, when they had found a suitable spot. "Now what shall it be?" Absently he took a penknife from his pocket.

"Why, just the thing," said Stuart. "Let's have an old-fashioned game of Mumble-peg."

And these three, who had left childhood such a little way behind them, settled down to the game with all the interest and eagerness of the old days at home.

Aping the negro style of banjoing, his fingers picking imaginary strings in perfect imitation, Stuart began to sing:

> "Oh, gimme de gal
> Wid de blue dress on
> Dat de white folks call Susanna,
> She stole my heart
> An' away she ran
> Down to Lou-siana."

While the game of Mumble-peg was being played, Kirkman was busy in his room, selecting the tie he would wear, brushing his shoes and hair, and endeavoring to make his personal appearance as attractive as possible.

"She's a downright pretty girl,—that's a fact," he mused. "Pretty is hardly a name for her; she's a beauty. I could love her as hard as a mule could kick, and not half try either. But I'll try—full strength. And the old man has the 'spons'—by the cart-load. It's just as easy to love a rich girl as a poor one. Just give this young lawyer a chance! That's what makes judges. Well, I'm off. It looks to me like 'Good-bye, Dull Times and Hardtack!' "

"I hope Father succeeded in filling his ice-house last winter, Mary?" Dean's abrupt remark showed that he was thinking of the coming hot summer and of watermelons just off the ice.

"Oh, yes; we have an abundant supply of ice. It was fully three inches thick, and we have had ice cream frequently since the beginning of this hot weather."

"That reminds me that I would like some now," said Dean. "I'll go and have some sent up right away. You two children play pretty while I'm away! I shan't be gone long," and he was off whistling as he went.

Mary's eyes, full of love, followed her brother as he walked away.

"Isn't he a picture? I'm so proud of him!" she said.

"Yes; I really feel when I think of old Dean

that 'Nature might stand up and say to all the world, "This is a man."' He has always meant so much to me, that dear old boy."

There was a brief pause after Stuart's remark. Then an involuntary glance showed him that his companion's eyes were alight with some new thought. "Dean told me that Mr. Acee took the Debater's medal," she half-questioned.

"Yes, he won it, and he deserved it."

"I don't—know—" she answered quizzically.

"Why?"

"I have heard you in debate." She was referring to some of their boy-and-girl arguments.

"Wait until you hear him, Mary; he is really a man of ability."

"No, I don't intend to wait, for if he is more of a master of the art than you are, I should fear the consequences. I still remember some of our arguments, Stuart. Once you removed the roof from a castle of mine; let in the rain to destroy all my carpets, tapestry, and paintings; tore down the edifice from its foundations of sand, as you declared it to be. Your conclusions were as dependent on your premises as were the framing timbers of The-House-that-Jack-Built. If you could do all that, and so gracefully, I'm afraid Mr. Acee might take me on a sky-high lark and leave me stranded in

some lonely desert of the moon, where every rag of clothes I had in the world would be out of style."

"I see you still think about your clothes," replied Stuart. "But here comes Mr. Acee now. And he's wide awake, too." Then, waving to Kirkman, who was approaching, he called out: "Come on!"

A pleased smile lighted up Kirkman's face as Mary extended her hand to him in friendly welcome.

"I am glad that you did not sleep through the entire afternoon," she remarked pleasantly, as she shook his hand. "Stuart was just telling me how dead you were to the world when he left you. He and I were just talking about you."

"I feel sure that my reputation is safe in Stuart's hands," and Acee threw a confident look toward his friend.

"Here come Father and Dean and the ice cream," said Mary, glad to get away from personalities.

Then the little party began. Even Mr. Melton sat down on the soft sward under the dense shade, and joined in the merriment.

At the first lull in the conversation Dean said, "Oh, sing something, Stuart." In his clear ringing tenor voice, Stuart began the old negro shouting song:

"Some of dese nights 'bout twelve o'clock
Dis ole worl' goin' to reel an' rock.
Pharaoh's army got drownded;
Oh! Mary, don't you weep.

"Sister, don't you weep,
Don't you wail, don't you moan!
Mary, don't you weep,
Don't you wail, don't you moan!
Pharaoh's army got drownded;
Oh! Mary, don't you weep.

"If I could I sholy would
Stand on de mount where Moses stood;
Pharaoh's army got drownded;
Oh! Mary don't you weep."

"What a pretty melody!" exclaimed Mary.

"Very good! very good, my boy!" said Mr. Melton.

"Thank you, sir," replied Stuart; "but if I had known that my singing might be considered a bid for your praises this crow would not have cawed."

"Horace advises," remarked Kirkman, "that birds that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing; and then he goes on to remark that when such birds do commence they rarely know when to desist."

"Then Horace did not know this bird, for that song was my Doxology," replied Stuart; "I have an engagement, so I must be going now. Many thanks for your treat, Dean. Good-bye."

"I too must go," said Acee. "Your mention

of an engagement reminds me of my promise to meet Professor Lastrange at 6:30. It is now 6:15. I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed my short visit. I shall be happy beyond words, Miss Melton, to renew our acquaintance."

"Why, you are going to Broadcastle with us, Kirkman," Dean observed; "and at home you and Mary will have to drop that tone of formality. So you might as well begin now."

"I shall be only too glad," replied Acee. "Henceforth shall it be 'Miss Mary'?" bowing to the girl.

"Why not, Mr. Acee?" and the frank look that accompanied the words was an assurance of good-will that gave that young man a feeling of keen content as he walked away with Stuart Maclin.

CHAPTER VI

THE crowds were gathering fast and soon the college chapel would be full. From every point and from every walk of life the people had come; there were maidens, fair, blushing at their first awakening to thoughts of loving and of being loved; there were rustic fathers, proud of their one-time bumpkin boys, now grown to sinewy men, refined by learning and qualified to stand as pillars of their proud old State; there were tender-hearted mothers too, with daughters, young and shy. They had all come to join the curious and applauding throng.

At length the hall was filled; the college President offered a prayer; the commencement ceremonies proceeded; each graduate in turn addressed the assembled guests,—friends who had come to speed them on their departure from college life into the more serious world of affairs.

The address of no graduate was received with greater appreciation than that of Kirk-

man Acee in brilliant support of the principle "To the Victor Belong the Spoils."

Too soon it was all over,—the speeches, the applause, the excitement, the conferring of diplomas, the farewells,—and then the trio of friends, with Mr. Melton and Mary, started on their journey to the isolated depths of Mecklenburg.

They were bound for Staunton Hill and Broadcastle, situated on the picturesque hills of the Staunton, fully twenty miles from the nearest railway station,—in the heart of what had been known for a century as the "Black Belt" of Virginia. There the estates, large in area and with many slaves to till the rich low-grounds of the Staunton river, were the cornucopian granaries of the Commonwealth,—the new land of Goshen, the new valley of the Nile.

In spite of the wealth in that region, domestic economy was ever the watchword in the management of these immense principalities. Almost every necessary article required for home use was produced at home: wool, flax, and cotton in abundance were raised, then spun and woven into cloth and made into clothes; hides were tanned into leather and made into shoes; brick was burnt and stone was quarried for the houses; timber was riven and fashioned into wagons, plow beams, and handles; wheat

was ground into flour, and Indian corn into meal; cattle and hogs were raised and slaughtered,—all, all was made at home, and strictly for home consumption.

There were among the slaves artisans skilled in every necessary trade. The natural increase of slave families, under the prudent, hygienic regulations of their masters, was steadily replenishing the country with the most efficient body of laborers that the world had ever known, and at the same time with a people, on the whole, as happy and contented as any like number in any state, or in any condition of life,—barring none.

Those were the conditions in Virginia when slavery existed. The blacks, as a people, were well cared for; they had no responsibilities, no cares; collectively, they were happy; and the sum total in life for any man, or race of men, is, after all, no more than well being and contentment.

Broadcastle, one of the great estates of that rich Black Belt, was a picture of domestic comfort with its large lawns and its towering oaks, in the midst of which stood the colonial mansion, crowning the river heights. The Doric columns of the full length porch,—tall, plain, and white,—gave an air of distinction to the front; and the general design of the house,—with its height and with the plainness of its

massive box-cornice,—suggested the art of the ancient Greeks. But the finish of the interior woodwork revealed the joiner's art when at its height in America. Every plank in the heart-pine floors was so matched in grain and shade of color and was laid so neatly that the seams were scarcely perceptible. The over-arching *travesas* between spacious *salas,* or drawing rooms, were of lofty height, with fluted wooden columns on their sides, serving as bases for the arches. These arches were plain and broad, curving gently to their central wooden keys; the color scheme was white; but beneath the arches swung massive double doors of polished mahogany, trimmed in brass. The mantels were of plain white marble slabs, cut on lines of the square; the hearthstones were narrow,—far too narrow, but for the saving grace of guarding fenders that stood before the open fires, showing on their polished fronts in fret-work figures cut entirely through the sheets of brass, picturing the chase.

But, aside from the furnishings, the crowning beauty of those rooms hung upon the walls. There hunting scenes, sketched from lonely forests, now deep and dark, now brightened by the beams from open sky, revealed the pleasures of the chase; and throughout the panels no mural showed a once repeated scene. The whole was done in water colors, in lichen shades

of green and mauve, with here and there a tinge of burnished brass, like the iris on a dove. Tradition declared that the founder of the family and the lord of this manor, Sir Aylwyn Melton, had employed the best mural artist of his native England to paint these scenes on scrolls, that his American castle might please the esthetic taste of his fair Virginian bride.

The furniture of these *salas* was plain, solid mahogany, upholstered in black hair-cloth; and on the walls, beneath the panels of the scenes, were crossed and fixed specimens of sporting arms of every age and clime. Search and ample means had brought them from distant quarters of the world. Throughout the house no useless bric-à-brac was seen, no senseless ornaments, but chandeliers of brass, with prismatic crystal pendants encircling the candle-cup of each out-curving arm of bronze, were here and there in place.

In short, everywhere was dignified, stately simplicity, unoffensively displayed; for everything served a purpose in that spacious house, and was the best of its kind. The Wedgwood, the crystal, the china, and the old plate that filled the glass presses in the dining-hall were heirlooms. And the gentle courtesy that every inmate showed alike to rich and poor, that by any chance crossed that threshold, was likewise a heritage from those of olden times.

And that night the tallow candles burned within. The master and his family, together with two guests, were expected. The supper would be ready soon after they arrived; and it had to be hot, not merely warm, but hot,—piping hot,—just from the long-handled skillets on the kitchen hearth of mammoth flat cut-stone.

CHAPTER VII

"REALLY, you must excuse my haste in eating this delightful breakfast, but I want to get away as early as possible." Stuart addressed himself to the fair hostess, who presided at the head of the table with the dignity of a queen. "I am anxious to see Father."

"Can't you stay with us until the afternoon?" Mary asked, cordially.

"I would be delighted to do so; you know how I enjoy Broadcastle; but I must go, for I haven't seen Father yet, and he will be anxiously expecting me. Dean, can you go over with me? and Kirkman, I shall be glad to have you, too."

"Thank you,—no; I am jaded now. I will remain quiet for a few days; I crave rest—rest—nothing but rest—and relaxation," replied Acee, turning to Mary.

"Well, how about you, Dean? Can't you go?"

"Yes, Stuart, if Kirkman will excuse me?"

and he looked enquiringly toward the latter.

"Oh, go, by all means. I am too contented where I am to care to stir from this spot."

"Then let's go right over on horseback, Stuart."

Colonel Maclin was greatly delighted at the arrival of the "boys," as he called the two young men.

"You both have done nobly,—royally fine,—and I'm proud of you. Abram has been enquiring every day, Stuart, just when you would return. The old soul dotes on you. Probably you remind him of the old days, when Mammy Liza used to hold you in her arms and talk affectionately to you, as long as you would submit to the petting. The old man has seemed to decline rapidly since she died last fall. Cheer him all you can when you see him! Faithful old soul! He still grieves for Liza; she was so kind to him."

"I'm so attached to the old man, Father, that I'm afraid I shall cry when I see him. I shall at once think of her,—that dear old soul, my Mammy Liza."

"By-the-way, Colonel," asked Dean, "how is Timekeeper standing his training and racing?"

"Finely, finely! His training has been so light the past two years that I believe he will

last for years to come and still be good. I have only run him in two races a year, and those were near together in the fall; so he has really rested most of the time in his grass paddock. He ought to last long with that management."

"Let's go and see the horses now!" proposed Dean.

The three got their hats and went to the stables at the foot of the hill.

"Well, bless my soul! dar's young Marster!" exclaimed Unc' Abram, walking spryly toward Stuart, with arms outstretched.

"How are you, Unc' Abram?" enquired Stuart in a solicitous tone; and the old negro threw his arms about the young man, embracing him warmly. As the grasp was relaxed Stuart saw that Unc' Abram's eyes were filled with tears, and he knew that memories of the past were crowding into his old friend's brain. The old man, he knew, associated him with Mammy Liza.

"Yes, sir, young Marster; she's gone to her res'. De las' word I heared 'er say was,—'Tell my boy to be good, an' de Lord will bless 'im.' You know she always called you by dat name."

"Yes, yes!" replied Stuart, sadly; "it will be worth while to be good just to meet her again where she has surely gone. Unc' Abram, what became of the ring I gave her, and put upon her finger?"

The old man held up his hand; he could not speak for a moment; then he said:

"Here 'tis, sir! She gave it to me near 'bout her las' breath; an' she say: 'Abram, take dis and w'ar it! my boy give it to me, an' tol' me dat it was a sign of everlastin' love 'tween us. I'm goin' away now, an' you take it, an' w'ar it! It'll be a sign for you de same as for me!' An' den she say what I tol' you was de las' word I heared 'er say,—'Tell my boy to be good, an' de Lord will bless 'im.' "

For a moment Stuart could not speak; then he managed to say: "Wear the ring, Unc' Abram. Let it be a like sign between us in the years to come."

"I will, my boy!" the old man replied, smiling through his tears, and nodding his head up and down, again and again.

Just then Colonel Maclin came up.

"Abram, how is that filly that was foundered this morning?" he enquired.

"Well, Marster; she's entirely over it, sir. She was so stiff in her fore legs she couldn't walk when I first noticed her dis mornin', but I drenched 'er wid de white of a dozen fresh eggs an' a quarter of a pound of powdered alum, shuck-up in a bottle, an' she got well in a hour."

"That is a specific for founder," remarked the Colonel. "And, strange to say, not a vet-

erinary seems to know anything about it. None of their books mention it. The whole world should know this, for the sake of the noble animal."

After lingering around the stable for a time, the Colonel and the two younger men started to go.

"Well, Unc' Abram," Stuart threw back cheerfully, "I'll see you now every day."

"Yes, sir, I hopes so. Come evvy day, please, sir."

The party leisurely strolled up the path to the house.

That evening when Stuart and Dean returned to Broadcastle they found Mary and Mr. Acee seated, vis-à-vis, on a rustic seat beneath the old oaks of the front lawn. She had been reading to Kirkman nearly all the afternoon from America's poet-priest, Father Ryan.

"He is so full of sympathy,—of tender sentiment," had been her comment to Kirkman, when she had commenced to read to him from the volume. "His thoughts and conceptions, clothed with graceful words, are like the Virgin and Child; adorned with holy vestments," she continued. "Let me read to you 'Their Story Runneth Thus.' " So she read it to him, as he sat beside her on the rustic seat. And now and then she would comment on the sentiment of the lines.

"Pray," Kirkman suggested, "that we may be spared from romantic love, sacrificed to sentiment."

"No, no, not that; my head will save me from a romantic love."

"Then," he enquired, "your heart has never been pierced by Cupid's tender darts?"

"No," she replied; "I have never met him; I wouldn't know the gentleman if I should meet him in the road. I have heard, though, that he is a gallant knight,—a 'crack-shot' sportsman, and an easy guest, satisfied with a crumb,—of comfort."

The conversation was broken into by the cry:

"Hello there! you playful children," and Stuart with Dean beside him came across the lawn. "Get ready for your milk and bread!"

Then the two friends went on to the house, and up to their room; while the other two soon separated—to prepare themselves for supper as Stuart had suggested.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. MELTON invariably ate his self-prescribed suppers in his private room,—limiting himself to two brown biscuits and a cup of coffee. Heavy suppers, he believed, were injurious to his health. He shied away from the temptations of the family supper table.

So on this evening the young hostess, Mary Melton,—with Stuart and Kirkman and Dean,—sat at the family board of Broadcastle, in the soft flickering yellow light of two spluttering tallow candles. It was a merry party and a hungry one, too; for not one of the young men refused his quota of beaten biscuit, brought every few minutes in piling platefuls hot from the far-away kitchen in the yard. Conversation never halted; and laughter, too, at times ran its merry scale, up and down, and around the bounteous board, until Jack, the colored waiter, becoming infected with the "comic shakes," found it difficult to confine himself to the decorous limits of a dry and silent grin

that, at times, would expand from ear to ear. Once he nearly spilled a plateful, bowing down and over, in his desperate efforts to restrain a laugh.

"We must take Kirkman over to old Gilgal meeting-house one day this week," said Dean. "Stuart, our old friend,—Brother Manning,—is holding forth there with a protracted meeting."

"Oh, Stuart, do tell Mr. Acee about the last time we went to hear Brother Manning," said Mary, her eyes twinkling.

"To appreciate the story, Kirkman, you would have to know Brother Manning. He is desperately earnest. He prays and exhorts; then exhorts and prays. On this occasion he exhorted the big congregation with all his might. At length he said: 'If there is any one here who wishes the prayers of the church in his behalf let him hold up his hand!' Not a hand was raised. 'If there is any one here who has a father to be prayed for let him signify it by holding up his hand!' Not a hand was raised. 'If there is any one here who has a mother for whom the prayers of the church are asked let his hand be raised!' Still no hand went up. 'If there is any one here who has a brother, or a sister, or a son, or a daughter, for whom our prayers are desired let him or her hold up a hand!' The falling of a pin could have been

heard, so tense was the silence, but still not a hand went up. After a somewhat embarrassing pause, a little squeaky-voiced man away back in the audience arose and said: 'Brother Manning, I have two second cousins over in the 'j'ining county; you may pray for them if you want to, sir.' "

"The little man's voice amused me so at the time that I could hardly keep from laughing out loud," said Mary. "I remember, too, how often Brother Manning called on 'Sister Minty' to pray. Every now and then on the most trivial pretext he would call to the old sister: 'Pray for us, Sister Minty! Pray for us, please!' "

"Yes, and I remember that a few days afterward," put in Dean, "the Colonel sent Stuart and me to drive a hog out of his potato patch. He cautioned us to drive it out through the side gate. But, full of boyish play, and barefooted, we rolled up our button-round breeches, and set sail after the hog. We caught it, threw it over the fence, and broke its back. There the hog lay, unable to get up. Then Stuart looked at me, and I looked at him; and we took it turn about looking at the hog and then at each other. We both instinctively realized that a state of war existed. Stuart could only say: 'Oh, lordy! oh, lordy!' and hold up his hands in horror at the thought of what was coming to

him. I comforted him with: 'Pray for us, Sister Minty! Pray for us, please!' "

"The prayers of Sister Minty must have saved me; for I remember that the old gentleman let me off," said Stuart. "Probably I got him in a jolly good humor about something, and told him about the hog before he finished laughing."

And thus the conversation drifted from one memory of the old days to another. In the midst of reminiscing Dean suddenly asked:

"Suppose we go seining to-morrow, Stuart? We can get two of the colored boys to help, and we can catch all the pike and perch we want."

"And we'll fry some of the fish right on the creek bank for our dinner," replied Stuart, delighted. "They are fine that way! I can almost taste them now."

"What do you say to it, Kirkman?"

"Dean, if you'll excuse me I won't go. I'm tired; I want to rest,—rest and quiet are what I want; nothing else. You boys go ahead!"

The following morning Dean and Stuart were up and out early, making preparations for the day's sport. Immediately after breakfast they left for the creek, with the wagon loaded with the sein, frying-pan, meal, and other requisites for a pleasant day's outing.

Mr. Acee remained at Broadcastle. Through-

out the day his body was at rest; but not his head; indeed, that part of the human machine worked overtime a great part of that day.

"Shall we resume our yesterday's rustic seat, Miss Mary?" The two were walking on the front porch, when the thought suddenly appealed to him.

"Certainly, if you desire; but what shall I take to read?" queried Mary.

"Nothing, if agreeable to you. I have a limited time to stay at Broadcastle, and I want to spend all that remains of it, not in the company of any stranger, no matter how entertainingly he may speak through his book. I prefer your own words. I want to listen to your thoughts. I wish to learn to know—just you." His voice grew low in its earnestness, and unconsciously they both moved in the direction of the rustic seat.

"My thoughts, Mr. Acee?" she laughed lightly. "They are not very profound. They touch only lightly on many subjects,—like wandering minstrels that play snatches on many instruments."

"No man ever admires depth of thought in a woman. Not caring for it in her, he never discovers it. All that he longs to find in her is the depth of her great womanly heart,—filled with tenderness, fidelity, truth, and love. When I find that woman I shall tell her 'the

old, old story,' that men have been telling in different ways since the days of Adam."

A quizzical smile lit up Mary's features, but she said nothing.

"Don't smile so! I am not speaking in jest, as you seem to believe. I was never more in earnest in my life. But you only laugh at my declaring what is in my heart."

"Oh, so it is an affair of the heart, is it?" Her laugh burst forth, innocently merry.

"Yes; just that. But you will give me no encouragement." There was a suspicion of irritation in his tone that Mary was not slow to notice.

"Oh, well then, go on!" she sighed in mock resignation. "The bee should never be deprived of his right to gather honey."

"I have not accused you of depriving me of anything; but you must acknowledge that you have deliberately attempted to turn me aside from what I had intended to say. I will speak, however. Even if I know that you do not look upon me with any special favor I shall dare to declare myself. I must be relieved of a heart-breaking burden. I must tell you that I love you. I have never said this to any other woman. There is something about you that appeals to me,—that stirs me in a way that no other woman can,—that no other woman ever has. There is something in your personality,

irresistible, unexplainable,—a charm, an individuality that holds me, that attracts me, that fills me with a yearning, a longing to be near you, to own your love."

"Do pray, Mr. Acee!" she pettishly replied. The girl was disturbed by the man's vehemence. "You may possibly see in me something to please you, but you haven't known me long enough to form anything like a sensible estimate of me. Please don't speak further on this subject! Let your actions prove in the fulness of time what your real sentiments are."

"I will take you at your word, fair one. Feeling as I did, nothing could have restrained expression of my sentiments, notwithstanding your coldness, any more than an ice floe could stop the flow of Niagara. I shall go into the busy world filled with determination to win fame and fortune, and resigned to await patiently the time when I shall have made myself worthy of your love."

"I shall always be glad to hear of your success in life; but so far as love is concerned that must grow with growth and strengthen with strength. Love is too holy a passion to be given away for the mere asking; a woman's heart is won by the value of a man's deeds rather than by the vanity of his words. Fair speech may please a woman's fancy, it may win the promise of her hand, but, believe me, the

lasting love of a sensible woman is won by the testimony of a man's proven worth."

"Then I will live to prove my love for you by what I shall accomplish. It might have been expected that a woman not in love would have given such an answer. Your answer came from your head only; your heart is asleep."

"I trust you may succeed in all you may undertake, sir, 'further this deponent sayeth not.' Isn't that answer the language of the law?"

"Yes, it is, I believe; and I shall patiently bide my time." He had got the wrong answer, and realizing that he had progressed too rapidly in the solution of the problem, he resolved to try again. So Mr. Acee wiped off his slate, with resignation for a rubber.

CHAPTER IX

RETURNING in the late afternoon, Dean and Stuart brought a great string of perch and several fine pike as the result of their day's sport. A nice bunch of the smaller perch were to be fried for supper, and some of the larger broiled for breakfast, while a few of each kind were sent to the ice house, to be kept for Stuart to take to Staunton Hill.

After the young men had returned from their rooms they were sitting on the front porch with Mr. Melton and Mary when Stuart in an undertone said to the young girl: "Let's walk out on the lawn."

Nodding assent, she arose and together they went down the steps. It was the hour of twilight, and the whip-poor-wills were crying their peculiar "whip-poor-will-widow" alarums from different parts of the lawn. (This bird in Southeastern Virginia adds "widow" to the end of its whip-poor-will song.) Continuing their way along the main walk that led from the

house, Stuart and Mary finally sat down on the stone steps at the end of the front walk, on the outer edge of the lawn. From their position they could easily see whenever the party on the porch would be breaking up at the announcement of supper.

"Mary," said Stuart, apropos of nothing, "we ought to be very happy."

"Yes, Stuart; aren't we? But what suggested to you that thought at this time?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said slowly. "But so many things can happen to disturb ideal conditions of happiness. Just think how heaven-like have been your surroundings and mine since our earliest childhood until to-day!"

"But, why do you emphasize to-day, Stuart?" she asked, evidently wondering if it were possible he had guessed what had passed between her and Kirkman.

"Did I unconsciously emphasize it? I was only thinking of how happy we were when you and I played together as children. Do you recall when we both were yet in short dresses how we used to race together up and down this very walk? and how when grown larger we chased butterflies together over this lawn?—and how we searched for four-leaf clovers,—and gathered wild violets; and as we called to the shy little sand-bugs to come out, how we bowed our heads together close over their holes,

and intently watched for the moving of the sand that concealed them from our enquiring eyes?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Stuart; I remember all that." Her glad tone proved how clearly those memories lingered in her mind.

"And, Mary," he continued, with intense earnestness, "you recall as we stood together once on the old stile that leads to the orchard,—there, beyond the branch,—how I held your blue sun-bonnet filled with fruit and you said to me: 'Stuart, I wish you were my brother too. You are so helpful and kind; you are just the same to me as a brother anyway, because I love you just the same and that makes it so'?"

"Yes, Stuart, I remember it as if it had happened yesterday. My heart was as carefree as the little branch that ran near-by,—happy with the childish fancy that life would ever last, and that flowers would strew its pathway to the end."

"And probably you recall, Mary, how I then straightened myself up, trying to look like some great man, and I said: 'Never mind, little girl, some day I shall be a man, and then I'll make you proud; for I'm going to make you happy, if I can. I can't now; but some day I will—when I'm grown and am a man!' " His voice ceased; he seemed to be waiting for some reply from Mary.

It came in a low, confiding tone: "Every one of those little incidents I shall always remember, Stuart."

" 'When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things.' The stern realities of life now confront me, Mary. I can see ahead of me a great work to be done. The seriousness of its nature fills me with an intense desire to be up and about the task that I have set for my achievement. Soon I may be gone far away, and our pathways in life may so diverge that we may not meet for years. But I shall not forget you, my little girl! I shall remember you as the tender bud you were as you stood on the stile that day with a happy smile on your face, and regretted you could not have me for a brother; I shall remember you as you now appear,—a lovely rose; and I shall remember my promise that when I became a man some day I would *do* things that would make you glad. Do you think you will *always* remember, even as I shall remember through both the sunshine and the storm of future years?"

"Ah, yes,—Stuart; I could not, if I would, forget. And wherever you may go I shall await your promised return."

"Then this night shall be an epoch in our lives, Mary; and whatever may betide I shall

remember as a man the promise I made to you as a little boy."

"The memory of my feeling as a little girl now prompts me, as a woman, to plight this promise,—to await your return."

"Then we both fully understand, Mary," he concluded, as he arose, and reaching out his hand helped her to her feet. And as they slowly returned to the porch the alarms of the "whip-poor-will-widow" continued in their ears.

While they had been sitting there far away in the moonlight, Kirkman had thrown many inquiring glances in their direction. They had gone away from the porch in a merry mood,—light-hearted and gay. He noticed that they had returned solemnly thoughtful. Kirkman's intuition told him that something serious had brought about the change; doubtless the girl attracted Stuart as much as she did himself. Here, perhaps, he had a rival,—a man quite as good-looking as himself and in every way as attractive to a woman. Then vanity came to his rescue: "I can outtalk, outwit, and defeat him in the end," was his inward confident comment.

"Stuart," said Dean, "Father has just been making some plans for me, and the thought has occurred to me that probably you and Kirkman might find it agreeable to join me."

"What's the fun? I'm your partner for almost anything during the summer."

"I was just telling Dean," Mr. Melton said, "that I have some timber lands near the Greenbrier White Sulphur Springs, in West Virginia. Some time this summer I want him to go there and make a horseback survey of the property. I want a rough outline plat of the whole and an estimate of the timber. The work will require several weeks."

"I shall be glad to go with Dean and help all I can," replied Stuart.

"And I, too," said Kirkman, "provided it is done right away. I am thinking of taking the summer course of law at the University, and the term begins within three weeks."

"Then we had better get to work on this at once," said Stuart.

"All right," said Dean; "but how shall we go?"—looking at Mr. Melton.

"I suggest that you young gentlemen go on horseback. There are plenty of idle horses in the stables and you will need horses in doing the work. You can ride there within four or five days, spending the nights at farm houses along the way. And if you go at once, Mary and I will go by rail to the White Sulphur Springs for the summer. So we would all be near one another, and you could come there for a day or so each week."

"The plan is great," exclaimed Kirkman. "But how are the saddle-horses? If I should ride a rough-gaited horse for a whole day I would have to lay up in bed for repairs for a week afterward."

"Oh, never mind about that," quickly answered Dean. "We have one cracking good saddler here."

"How is he marked?" the prospective lawyer enquired.

"Red roan, with a blaze in his face."

"Am I to ride him?"

"Yes; you can take him."

"What a happy party we will make," said Mary. "And it will be the height of the season at the springs. We are going to have a delightful time."

CHAPTER X

THE second morning afterward found the party of young men jogging along the road toward Greenbrier, West Virginia, with Kirkman riding some little distance in front of the others.

The first day's ride nearly put the young fellows out of commission; and the second was really a day of sore trials. Kirkman had anticipated this condition of affairs,—not particularly that awful, tired feeling, but that muscle-racking, bone-breaking soreness that only those who rarely take long horseback rides can appreciate. He, therefore, was sharp enough to look out for number one when he spoke for and got the red roan with a blaze in his face.

But toward the end of the third day the boys had begun to be seasoned; and by the end of the fourth they joked one another about how they had groaned and crept around with old men's aches and pains during the first three days of the journey.

On the afternoon of the fourth day out the young men were still pressing on toward the end of their cross country journey. Kirkman was still in the lead, while Dean and Stuart jogged along together, occasionally spurring up their horses to overtake the superb saddler with the smooth, all-day gait.

Every experienced horseback rider who has taken a long journey of this kind can appreciate the discomfort of having frequently to put his horse into an unnatural, forced gait in order to keep up with a companion who is riding a horse of naturally quicker action. It is very tiresome. But Stuart and Dean rode on together, uncomplaining, and they talked pleasantly the while. Occasionally when riding along together with Kirkman one of them would make same facetious allusion to the qualities of their different horses. Both the roughgoers were roundly abused while the red roan received extravagant praise. Thus their delicately veiled meaning served, by virtue of indirectness, to chastise Kirkman for having got so much the best of them by his artful management. Stuart once suggested to him that he should go into the horse business,—he was such a perfect judge of a horse. But neither Stuart nor Dean berated him openly, and he never offered to exchange with them. L'Estrange said of the wise—"Æsop reminds men of their

errors, without twitting them for what's amiss."

On the fifth day they arrived at the foot of the towering Alleghanies; toward the late afternoon when they were far up the mountain side a light rain came up and the wind blew a gale. But steadily they continued to climb. At times the grade became laboriously steep, and at certain sharp turns in the road the travelers looked down hundreds of feet on the western side over the almost perpendicular walls of a cove below. To fall over at one of these points meant death to horse and rider. Views of picturesque grandeur loomed up at times as the road meandered in its steady ascent of the mountain. In the early afternoon, before commencing the climb, their way had been through a narrow valley between tall spurs of the mountain, and for hundreds of yards the shallow stream therein had been itself the roadway. Wading along through cold, clear, swiftly running water was anything but monotonous. Occasionally one of the horses would stumble over a stone concealed in a foot or more of water; then the man in front generally caught a shower of splashed water, and the feet of the rider of the blundering horse went down under the water, like an orthodox Baptist.

Night was approaching rapidly. A driz-

zling rain was falling from the densely clouded sky as Kirkman checked his horse, and awaited the coming up to his side of Stuart and Dean. As soon as they arrived he said:

"Boys, we'd better be thinking of where to spend the night; it is getting late, and the first thing we know it will be pitch dark and we will be without shelter."

"I have just been telling Stuart that," said Dean, "and we have agreed to inquire for lodging at the next sign of settlement we reach."

"We will stop, no matter how small the cabin may be," agreed Stuart. "These mountaineers are honest folk, even if they are suspicious of strangers."

They rode on and on climbing the mountain until it was nearly dark without meeting with any sign of settlement along the way. Finally a faint glimmer of yellowish light flickered in the distance ahead. Soon they reached the spot. Dim rays of firelight issued through the partly closed door of the rough log cabin, standing in the small cove some fifty yards from the roadside.

"Halloa!" Stuart gave the lusty shout.

An old man opened the door wider, and as it turned on it's dry, wooden-jointed hinges the c-r-a-a-shing sound nearly drowned his voice as he inquired:

"We-al! who's that?"

"Friends! We are travelers belated,—three of us,—and we want shelter for the night, if you please."

"I hain't got no room for yer," was the mountaineer's hospitable reply.

"Well, sir, we only want shelter from the rain. We don't want to trouble you about cooking or anything else."

"Stranger, I'd be more 'n glad ter 'commerdate yer, but I can't do nuthin' fur yer ternite."

"Get down off your horse, Stuart," said Kirkman in an undertone, "and go to him and let him see that you are a respectable-looking white man, and maybe you can persuade him to take us in. It's devilish hard luck for us to be turned loose in this rain and darkness."

Stuart dismounted and handed his bridle-rein to Dean.

Going to the door of the cabin, he took off his hat and made a respectful bow to the tall mountaineer standing there in the firelight that shone through the half opened door. Taking a position in the light, Stuart, with a kindly smile on his face, spoke to the old man.

"Good evening, sir! We are travelers and night has overtaken us. We will pay you well for our shelter. There are three of us,—friends,—though you do not know us, you must see that we are gentlemen."

"We-al," the man of the mountains drawled,

"I don't like these here travelin' gentlemens so awful well. I can't do nothin' fur yer, but you just go on,—is yer a-goin' up, or a-comin' down?"

"Up!" replied Stuart.

"We-al," continued the man, "as I was a-sayin', just go on up the road a bit of a piece, an' Sary Ann Jones an' Tom hev a house on de lef'-han' side just after yer gits to the nex' cove; they'll take keer of yer mos' likely. I just can't an' ain't a-gwine to; an' that's the las' word."

And the mountaineer took a step backward into the room and closed the door, leaving Stuart in the dark.

"Well! If that don't beat the Dickens!" he muttered.

They saw that there was nothing to do but to proceed on their way up the mountain, which they did, complaining bitterly of the rain, the wind, the darkness, and the inhospitality of the people. But they went slowly, and they kept watchful eyes on the off side of the road, where they knew that a dangerous precipice yawned. Should an unlucky digression be made from the road they would be dashed to certain death. Just sufficient twilight yet remained to enable them to proceed on their journey with extreme caution. At length they came to another cabin, set back about twenty

yards from the road; and this time Kirkman took upon himself the management of affairs.

He gave the regulation "Halloa!"

An old woman came to the door, and in a pipy, shrill note squeaked: "We-al."

"We want to get shelter, madam, if you please. We are belated travelers; we want shelter for the night. Won't trouble you about cooking anything for us. We simply want shelter from the rain and darkness."

"I'm pow'ful sorry, but I hain't got no place fur yer; an', besides, my grown darter's mighty sick and there ain't but one room. But if it's shelter you wants, why, jest go on up the mount'in about a mile an' thar's an old house thar you can git shelter in. How many is they of you?"

"Three, madam!"

"Then you're all right, I s'pose."

"Right? How, ma'm?"

"Oh! nothin'. I was jest only er-thinkin' of the sperits."

"Thinking of what? Explain, ma'm, if you please."

"Well, 'tain't nuthin' much fur three of yer together, I s'pose. In the old house I was a-tellin' you 'bout they says thar's a ghost that's done many a man to death. But I ain't never seen nothin' of it. I've hearn a pow'ful sight 'bout it, though. Folks has been run

outer the house time an' ag'in at night. But long as three of you's together, thar oughten' to be no trouble."

"No, ma'm; and it's only a roof above us that we want. Besides, we don't shy away from ghosts. We want a place to rest in, and are prepared to give any ghost that comes along a warm reception. We are very much obliged for your kindness, and we hope your daughter will soon be well."

"Not at all!"—her mind responding to only the first part of Kirkman's graceful speech.

"Good night, ma'am!"

"Gu-u-de ni-ite!" The old woman's voice drawled in a kindly tone.

Onward and upward the party trudged. This time Kirkman walked in front of the party and led his horse.

This walking in front brought him close to the roadbed, and enabled him the better to see the dangerous places on the off side toward the valley below. They boggled their way along in the darkness, and at length halted. The three wet and weary travelers had reached the so-called haunted house, which meant to them shelter and rest.

CHAPTER XI

THE clouds broke for a few moments, and in the uncertain light the boys saw on the immediate roadside a building long since given over to bats and owls. There were two stories, with an attic, and dormer windows on the front side. Long ago it had been a wayside inn, or traveler's rest, built for those who crossed the mountain range through this easy pass that nature had made. The house was of wood, with weatherboarding on the sides; the blinds were nearly all gone, and those that yet remained were merely skeletons, hanging warped, with slats falling out. The roof, too, was dilapidated, and in places the light entered through the gaping holes, while the thick covering of moss on top spoke plainly of another age. In many of the rooms the floors were unsafe; in fact, the whole structure was a sheer ruin jutted back against the mountain in the rear. Apparently the steep mountainside formed the back wall of the first floor rooms. The chimneys alone seemed to have withstood the ravages of time. Built of

massive stone, they stood erect and sound on the outside of the gable ends of the old hostelry.

Such a picture of desolation did it present that well might the neighboring people believe that therein dwelt the evil spirits of another world.

"Well, here we are," was Kirkman's remark, as he went up to the front door and felt for the latch. But even the door itself was gone, and all the floor as well. Climbing over the great door-sill, which was probably three feet from the ground, he struck a match and saw that where he stood must have been the original hallway. His quick glance around revealed an opening where a door had once hung; this led to a large room on the right of the hallway that seemed yet to have a whole floor.

Striking another match, he ordered: "Now, boys, one of you give the whip to my horse; make him jump the door-sill; we must get the horses under cover, too."

A cluck and a light tap of the switch, and over went Kirkman's horse. This was repeated until the three horses were within.

"Now, friends and countrymen," said Stuart, "I'll strike a match myself, and see where we are and what's the inlook."

Gathering some dry, dead wood from the

rotten timbers of the house, Dean quickly made a blazing fire in the large room adjoining the hallway where the horses had been tied. Taking off their wet garments, he, Stuart, and Kirkman held them to dry as best they could while they laid some on the flat stone hearth. Then they settled comfortably before the roaring fire, sitting on the saddles that they had taken from the horses, along with the blankets and other baggage. A good lunch from the bag strengthened them and made them better satisfied with their rough and ready quarters.

As they sat and smoked their pipes they talked of the old woman's ghostly warning; the wind whistled a gale without and blew the rain into the room on one side; the skeleton shutters flapped their weird wings, like some great night-birds of ancient fable, and the rain came down, pattering, while above it all the roar of a mountain torrent, as it dashed headlong over rocks, plainly echoed from a distant cove.

"What do you suppose could have induced these people to believe that this house is haunted?" Dean asked.

"Don't know; but there must have been many tragedies enacted in these old mountain inns years ago, when robbers lurked in mountain passes and lived by their trade," Kirkman

answered. "There may have been some such horrible story told about this house fifty or a hundred years ago; who knows?"

"And who knows but that those same robbers have left sons and grandsons in these parts to follow their fathers' calling? 'As the old cock crows the young one learns,'" suggested Stuart.

"Hardly anything like that in these days," was Dean's comment. "Yet, after all, there may be a lawless band in these rough mountains, ready to rob us."

The young men, having dried their clothes, eaten a bite from the bag, and smoked their pipes, concluded that it was high time to spread out their saddle blankets before the fire and lie down for the night. The saddles were put under the far edges of the blankets, to serve as pillows, and the blankets were spread side by side and near together.

"We had better put our weapons on the floor near us for protection," suggested Dean; "we don't know what might happen."

"There is my pistol, on my right," said Kirkman, examining it to see that it was loaded.

"And I'll put mine just beyond my head. Why don't you fix yours in the same position, Stuart. It's so handy to reach," urged Dean.

"I haven't any pistol," replied Stuart, "but

I brought a big bush-knife. It weighs about a pound, more or less, and is one of the deadliest weapons in the world at close range. I thought I might need it in the brush. I'll open it and lay it here close by me on my left. And I'll use it, too, if that ghost comes prowling around to-night. My! this floor is hard. Good-night, boys!" And he tried to settle himself for the night.

Suddenly Dean's voice broke the silence: "I wonder what's the matter with me? I certainly do feel queer here."

"Oh," said Kirkman, "you're not letting that old woman's babble keep you awake."

"It isn't that," put in Stuart; "there's really something uncanny about this place. I can feel it."

"Rubbish," was Kirkman's comment. And again silence held the room.

Soon all were asleep, and the flickering fire died upon the hearth.

After midnight the rain ceased, and, the clouds having passed away, the full-faced moon hung resplendent in the western sky. All nature now seemed calm; the warring elements had declared a truce, and were sleeping soundly on their arms.

Suddenly in the late hours of the night—or it may have been the early morning—a cry of "Murder" startled the silence of the

room; and again came the awful word. Kirkman opened his eyes and saw Stuart and Dean side by side on the floor, struggling violently, Stuart with the brush-knife in his hand, striking and thrusting at Dean, while Dean manfully struggled to restrain him. Kirkman seized Stuart firmly, and pulled him well away; while Dean made an effort to rise, but fell back groaning with pain, for Stuart's blows with the great brush-knife had left several ghastly wounds in the poor boy's neck and head. Kirkman, seizing Stuart, exclaimed loudly: "Stop! stop, Stuart! For mercy's sake, stop! What do you mean?"

Dean, now on his knees, groaned in agony. Stuart, who had jumped up, stood still a moment, rubbing his half-closed eyes, while Kirkman supported Dean.

"Are you hurt? Are you hurt, Dean?" inquired Kirkman excitedly. "Wait! I'll make a light."

"Oh, my head! my head!" was the wounded man's only answer as he pressed it with his hands.

Stuart started toward Dean. "My God! my God! Dean!" he cried and clasped his friend in his arms.

"Go for a doctor, please! quick!" And Dean pushed away the supporting arms as he fell back in a swoon.

At Dean's words Stuart rushed to the door, first seizing his saddle, which he threw on the nearest horse,—and almost instantly he was out and away.

Kirkman meantime had hurried to the hearth, striking matches to make a light with chunks left from the fire.

A feeble blaze soon rewarded his efforts, and in a few moments the firelight filled the room, on which a sudden silence had fallen.

"Dean! Dean!" called Kirkman.

But there was no reply; and Kirkman realized that the wounded man had fainted. Hurrying out of the door, he scooped up in his open palms as much water as he could from a pool of rain water, and returning to the room, he threw it in Dean's face; he rubbed his wrists with it and bathed the bloody head with cool, wet hands.

After a little while Dean revived and, between his groans, he begged piteously:

"For mercy's sake, someone, go and bring a doctor!"

"Are you seriously hurt, Dean,—are you badly hurt?" Kirkman bent over him.

"Yes, it is awful. My head,—my head! Go and get a doctor!"

"All right, I'll go at once." He turned away as the wounded boy called, "Stuart!"

"He has fled."

"No, no! Fled? No; not Stuart! But go and get me the nearest doctor, Kirkman."

"All right; I'm off. I'll be right back with the doctor." And Kirkman was gone, galloping down the mountain road with all possible speed, the noisy clatter of flying feet echoing from the mountain coves.

CHAPTER XII

GOING down the mountain in flying haste, Kirkman met a man riding upward leisurely.

"Can you tell me where to find a doctor?"

"What's the trouble?" the man asked.

"A friend of mine has been stabbed and I want a doctor. Tell me quickly, for unless I can get him at once I fear it will be too late."

"The nearest doctor, down this way, lives some thirteen miles off. If you will turn and go up the road, a better doctor can be found in less than half the distance."

"Well then, I will," and Kirkman wheeled his horse around as he spoke.

"But, friend, where did this thing happen, and when?"

"In the old house up yonder, about a mile away. There were three of us sleeping there and one of us was stabbed by another, who ran away. Didn't you meet him?"

"No; I turned into this road from a path about one mile back from here. But I'll turn and catch him if I can; I'm a constable."

"But can I find a doctor anywhere near?"

"Easy enough! Go on by the regular road up the mountain, and in the first two-story white house you come to on the left you'll find Dr. Beach."

The two horsemen went in different directions.

When the constable reached the cabin in which the old woman lived he saw a stranger on horseback at the door, talking with her in an excited manner.

Reining in his horse and stopping near the two, he listened for a moment, and heard enough to satisfy him that he had his man. He drew a pistol from his pocket and held it ready.

"Who are you?" asked the officer.

"That makes no difference just now, my friend."

"But it does. You are my prisoner. I'm an officer of the law. I hold you for murder. I'm going to take you to the place where you did it."

"No, man, I cannot——"

"If you speak another word I'll blow you to the devil," replied the constable, in a gruff tone.

"You are a fool, and I'll say it even if you do blow me to the devil," Stuart answered with warmth.

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"Well, now, my man," firmly replied the officer, "don't be ugly! I've got you, and that you know mighty well. The other young man has gone hurrying for the doctor up the mountain road. He'll soon return with Dr. Beach. Your friend will tell you to your teeth that he saw you murder a man who slept with you. Lead the way, young fellow! Go kindly now, and we'll wait at the old haunted house until they come."

"I came myself for that very——"

"Stop now, sir," interrupted the officer; "not another word, or I'll kill you instantly."

They went up the mountain road, Stuart in front and the constable behind, covering him with his weapon.

Returning by way of the haunted house, Kirkman rode up to the window, and looking in, with dread in his heart, he saw Dean still lying as he had left him.

"Dean, my boy, how are you standing it?"

"I may last." His voice was weak and tremulous. "But the doctor? Where is he?"

"I will have him here within an hour, old boy." As he turned to leave he added: "A man has gone to arrest Stuart."

Dean caught the words "to arrest Stuart," and something prompted him to take from his inner pocket a memorandum book and a pen-

cil. Laboriously he wrote some lines in the book, then he put it back in his pocket.

When the constable arrived with his prisoner Dean had again become unconscious and was apparently asleep, though he frequently writhed and groaned.

Stuart quickly opened his saddle-bags. Taking out a clean linen shirt, he tore it into bandages, and dipping them into the pool near the door he washed away the blood from Dean's face and neck, then bound up the wounds. Tears flowed down his cheeks and he talked to himself in an undertone while he was ministering to the comfort of the wounded boy.

Within an hour the doctor arrived with Kirkman, accompanied by several men and boys of the neighborhood, who had heard the news from Kirkman. Men kept coming in every few moments,—singly, and by twos and threes,—until a considerable gathering had assembled.

The doctor went straight to the patient, loosed the bandages and examined the wounds. Bathing the wounds thoroughly, he touched them over with turpentine and sprinkled some strange powder on them, after which he bound them up again.

"The patient should be taken to the White Sulphur Springs as soon as possible," said the

doctor. "There he can be nursed in the hospital, and have the attention of Dr. Singleton, the resident physician."

"But," said a man from the crowd, "this prisoner is entitled to a hearing of the case before any other important move is made. I am the law,—the magistrate for this district."

The crowd nodded approval and the magistrate continued:

"Constable, on whose charge did you arrest this man?"

"On the charge, your honor, of that man there," pointing toward Kirkman Acee.

"Come forward, sir," ordered the magistrate, "and be sworn."

Kirkman was duly sworn, kissing the small, dog-eared Book that the magistrate had produced from his pocket.

"State your name, age, residence, and occupation, and also your knowledge of the facts in this case," ordered the Court.

"My name is Kirkman Acee; age, twenty years. I am a resident of the State of Mississippi. The wounded man's name is Dean Melton, of Virginia; the prisoner's name is Stuart Maclin, of Virginia. We have been friends,—as I have fully believed till now,—for three years past. We were at college together. There we were lately graduated. From the college we went to visit at the home

of the man who now lies here wounded by the hand of his friend."

He sharply emphasized "friend," paused, then continued his statement:

"After we had remained there a few days we were requested by Melton's father to ride across country on horseback to examine some lands. Yesterday, being unable to get lodging elsewhere along the way, we turned in here to spend the night. We spread our blankets and side by side upon this floor we talked ourselves to sleep. At that time we were the best of friends, I thought.

"In the late hours of the night,—or rather in the very early morning hours,—I was awakened by screams of 'Murder!' Quickly springing to my feet, I saw Dean, the wounded man, grappling with some one. The moon was shining brightly and cast its beams more than half way across the floor. I sprang to the rescue of my friend, and, grappling his assailant with both hands, I wrenched him from his bloody work just as he uttered the words, 'All his wealth is mine.'

"I looked into his face closely, and I cannot be mistaken in the man who did the deed. It was he who now stands as prisoner of this Court,—Mr. Stuart Maclin. And, as I said, I heard him say, 'All his wealth is mine.'

"As soon as he saw that there had been a

witness to the deed he fled. I am sure you have the right man."

"Was there any reason why he should have done this?" inquired the Court.

"None that I know of, your honor."

"Did they ever quarrel, or was there any contest, or ever any rivalry between them?"

"Not within my knowledge now," answered Acee, with stress on "now."

"Then what is your theory of his reason for committing the act? Did he expect to rob his victim or get possession of any of his property by reason of his death?"

"I have no theory. How he hoped, as he said, to gain all the wealth of Dean I do not know."

"That will do for the present; you can stand aside," ordered the magistrate.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE accused will now be sworn. Come forward, sir!" ordered the Court, nodding to Stuart.

"State your name, age, place of residence and such facts as you may know relating to this case," ordered the Court.

The witness told his name, age, and place of residence. Then he testified:

"Your honor: I am dazed; I am bewildered. I fear I am incompetent to tell clearly all the facts connected with this case. But I'll do the best I can. Last night as we three lay sleeping on the floor I dreamed of a figure,—tall, and gaunt, and white. It stood within the doorway,—silent, and ghostly, and grave. It beckoned with its arm, bidding me to come,—come. I saw it as the figure of some giant, dead,—with fleshless bony arms, clothed in robes of white, that fell full flowing to the floor. He moved his arms, and my blood ran cold as I gazed on this thing. But quickly I reasoned to myself,—'This is but some trick of the shadows.' Then I arose, and rubbed

my eyes, and saw, or thought I saw,—for it was a dream,—that the figure stood and waved its arms, and beckoned, as it had done before. I said to myself, 'This cannot be a dream. I see the movement of his arms; and, too, I am awake, because I know I rub my eyes and stand. It is the figure of a man, or ghost, or else the shadow of a tree, cast by moonlight through the door.'

"And, your honor, although I now with sorrow *know* it was a dream, yet then I satisfied myself,—although asleep in fact,—that I was awake; and as I grasped my knife that lay on the floor my courage came. In my dream I asked, 'Who is that?' There came no answer, but the figure moved, and again I said, 'What do you want?'

"And then there came this answer,—'Follow me!' 'No,' I said, quite loud, 'I will not! Leave this minute, or I'll kill you.' Again the figure beckoned with his arms, and answered in a deep bass voice, 'Follow me!'

"I took a forward step or two, then stopped; I saw the figure too had done the same; and by that time in a rage I asked, 'What the devil do you want?' And quickly came his answer, in a husky, bass-toned voice: 'Here I was murdered fifty years ago; and now my spirit finds relief to meet a man of flesh whose courage does not quail, who does

not quake when faced by one not of this world. Aha! ha! ha! hah!' he laughed as if gloating on his find; then he added: 'Follow me! my treasures are nothing to me now. Follow me, and freely will I give you all.'

"Your honor, pardon, please, this long recital of a foolish dream; but it must be told to show this Court why the witness who preceded me made me say: 'All his wealth is mine.' Well, to go on, I followed to the stairway in the hall and stopped; and again the figure said, 'Follow me!' And on again I went,—up the stairway to another hall above, thence along that to still another stair, and up that to the attic floor, when, looking down the long deserted floor, as the moonlight shone through the dormer windows, I saw that the figure had grown short. I hastened to the spot where he had but now stood, and there I saw an opening in the floor. I stooped and felt within the hole, and found a ladder running down, made of chains that waved and swayed back and forth, back and forth, like the great pendulum of some ancient hallway clock. There I stood a moment, gazing down in depths of darkness far below; then again there came the low-toned words from the depths, 'Follow me!'

"Grasping my knife in my right hand, down the ladder I went until I reached the

floor, the earth, damp, and cold, and hard; and then I saw the figure raise his arm and heard him say: 'Man of courage! ha! ha! ha! hah! there hangs my treasure; there! Pierce this bag! 'Tis gold! Repeat my words and say: "All this wealth is mine!" So will it be! Strike! Strike! Strike!' "

"Your honor, I obeyed. Then I awoke and found to my horror that I had stabbed my friend. I have told you the truth, sir."

Stuart's voice stopped. Then the Court spoke:

"If that is all," said the magistrate, "please stand aside. Constable, were there any papers about the person of the wounded man?"

"Yes, sir, here is a memorandum book and some other papers that I took from his pocket."

"Give them to me."

After looking over the papers the Court opened the book, turning the pages over carefully one by one. Then he stopped and read, afterwards asking suddenly:

"Mr. Acee, as a witness again, do you know the handwriting of the wounded man?"

"Yes, your honor,—well."

"Then is this his writing?"

Acee recognized it at a glance.

"Yes, sir, certainly it is; unquestionably."

"Then the case is clear. There is no reason

to justify the holding of the accused. There is no evidence of guilt. This Court orders the prisoner to be discharged."

"Mr. Maclin, take these papers and this book; deliver them to whom they may belong, —to his family."

So saying, he handed them to Stuart and ordered the Court adjourned.

"I'm very sorry, Stuart," said Kirkman, "that I gave the testimony I did. I jumped at a conclusion without duly considering the absurdity of it. But I did hear you say, 'All his wealth is mine,' and I couldn't deny that. From those words I formed a hasty conclusion; I regret my damaging testimony."

"I bear you no hard feeling, Kirkman. Your excitement made you go too far in your testimony. But couldn't you see that I was asleep? Our long friendship should have received more consideration when you were drawing your conclusions. It is all right, though." And they shook hands.

CHAPTER XIV

"DOCTOR," said Stuart, "please do not leave yet. We will need your services on the road. My friend must be taken to some place where he can receive proper attention."

"All right, sir," replied Dr. Beach. "I am at your service. Take him to the White Sulphur Springs. There every comfort can be obtained. And the resident physician is a retired army surgeon,—Dr. Singleton."

"How far is it?"

"About thirty miles. I know the nearest cuts, and we can make it in a day. The road runs along the Greenbrier river most of the way, and is nearly all good. There are only two rough stretches. The patient is better able to travel to-day than he will be later. We must be off as soon as possible."

The doctor sent at once for a conveyance.

Within a short while the doctor's wagon had come and they set out on their journey. Dean lay in the wagon, stretched out, unconscious, on a pallet of straw, with pillows carefully

placed under his head. Stuart sat beside him on the pallet, and watched over him. Dr. Beach and Kirkman led the way on horseback.

When they reached a certain fork in the road the Doctor said that they were within five miles of the Springs, and that they would arrive there by eleven o'clock that night.

"Stuart," said Kirkman, "don't you think it would be well for me to ride on ahead and break the sad news to Mr. Melton and Miss Mary? They must be there by now."

"Yes, go right ahead, Kirkman. It will be such a shock to them; they should be prepared for it. Tell them that the poor boy seems to have stood the trip as well as could be expected. Tell them that we are very hopeful of his recovery. Encourage them to hope."

Kirkman immediately hurried on in order to reach the Springs before Mr. Melton and Mary had retired for the night, and to make arrangements for quarters and medical attention for Dean.

When he arrived he was taken at once to Mr. Melton's rooms, and broke the news as gently as he could.

As soon as Mr. Melton could command himself he hurried out to find Dr. Singleton and to make preparations for taking care of Dean as soon as he arrived.

When the door closed behind Mr. Melton

Kirkman walked up to Mary, with both hands outheld. She grasped them as if for support, and looking full into his face with the appeal of suffering, she cried: "Do, please, tell me! I feel so stunned,—so faint."

He told her with seeming reluctance, giving this version: "The moonlight, streaming into the room from the two open windows, made the light almost as bright as day. I looked into his face closely, carefully, to be certain that it was Stuart, and to see whether he was angry; and, as he struck with the knife, thrusting and cutting Dean, I heard him say, 'All his wealth is mine.' He didn't deny this at the trial; in fact, he was forced to admit he had used these words, or else his evidence would have been impeached by me,—his friend,—a disinterested witness who had so testified. The defense he made was most remarkable,—peculiar to say the least; he laid his crime at the door of a foolish dream that he told at the trial. Well, he may have had the dream, but even if he did, how about his saying out aloud, 'All his wealth is mine,' as he did? That would look as if he were *wide* awake; there could be no possibility of his gaining any wealth there;—and then, too, his thought must have been of something elsewhere,—something that would pan out great wealth for him. I leave it to you to conjecture how,—in what

possible way,—he could gain all Dean's inheritance."

And Mary, sobbing and wiping the tears from her eyes, cried out:

"Mr. Acee! don't tell me any more! I will never believe that of Stuart. Oh, it's horrible,—horrible! My heart is sick,—is breaking. I feel as if I had lost the two dearest friends I had in the world."

CHAPTER XV

THE improvised ambulance arrived a few minutes after Mr. Melton had found the surgeon. Dean was put to bed at once in the hospital, and the surgeon promptly attended him. After Stuart had given Mr. Melton a brief but sorrowful account of the affair, and had promised to tell him more when he should be calmer, the old gentleman returned to his daughter. Kirkman was still with her.

"The poor boy is seriously wounded," Mr. Melton said as he entered the room. "Dr. Singleton cannot yet tell how serious it is. He will examine the wounds to-morrow, and now hopes that he may then be able to express his opinion."

"Father, I want to go and see Dean right away. I must," declared Mary.

"No, daughter; not to-night. He is sleeping now. Wait! you could do him no earthly good, and your presence might disturb him."

"Did you see Stuart, Mr. Melton?" inquired Kirkman.

"Yes, he expects to stay with Dean to-night, and to be present to help the nurse in charge."

"You spoke with Stuart, then?" Mary inquired.

"Yes. He seems so sadly distressed that he could only give me a brief account of the unfortunate accident."

Mary looked at Kirkman.

"Mr. Acee," she said, "I think your conclusions as to this affair are not justifiable. I believe that you have misunderstood, and that you are honestly mistaken."

Looking earnestly at Kirkman, Mr. Melton asked:

"What do you think about it?"

"After I had testified at the trial that I had heard Stuart say aloud as he was stabbing Dean, 'All his wealth is mine,' Stuart acknowledged in his own testimony later that he had used the words. He couldn't deny having used them, else his whole evidence would have been discredited. He, however, made the dream very well account for the words; very well, indeed; he brought them in so naturally, as a part of his dream, that the ignorant people present were taken by surprise. Those people there didn't know that Dean had an only sister and——"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Acee!" demanded Mr. Melton. "Was not Stuart asleep?"

"Do you understand, sir," replied Acee, "how he could have been asleep, and still testify as he did,—testify that he remembered having used the words at the time he was committing the act? The question is, could one remember words spoken aloud with intelligent emphasis and clearness of expression, and still not be sufficiently conscious at the time to know he was committing a crime?—a crime, as in this case, against one of his best friends, and by the accomplishment of which he expected to gain great wealth, as his very words declared? I, of course, am merely conjecturing as to what he expected to gain by committing the deed. I may be wrong. However, I am satisfied, sir. But you both are worn out with anxiety, and should get some rest; it is now after one o'clock. Good night! I will see you to-morrow. Let us pray for Dean's recovery."

So saying, he left the rooms of the Meltons.

"Mary," said Mr. Melton, "what could Stuart have expected to gain in the way of wealth if he had slain Dean? Have you put two and two together on that line of thought?"

"No, Father; I have not. It is all a puzzle to me."

"But not to me, my daughter, if what I suspect is true. Has he ever made love to you?"

"No, Father,—not one word of outspoken sweetheart love,—not a word of it in his life."

"Sweetheart love?—Sweetheart love?" murmured Mr. Melton in a monotonous tone, looking at his daughter over his glasses. "What do you mean by sweetheart love? and what is the——"

"Excuse me, Father; I was afraid you would not understand that term. I mean that he has never made a positive declaration of love to me, but——" she hesitated. "He has been my friend from earliest infancy——" Again she hesitated.

"I understand, my daughter! I understand quite well."

He slowly nodded his head, with a smile of sympathy on his face. "I will see Stuart to-morrow, and shall hear his account of this terrible accident."

"I too must hear what Stuart says about it," said Mary. "I don't believe he intended any harm, even though Mr. Acee's statement does put him in a bad light."

"I shall hear his defense to-morrow," the afflicted father replied.

It was very late. He arose as he spoke, and drew her to him.

"Good night, dear Father! Oh, how I feel for you! But let us hope that Dean will soon be well. Good night," and she kissed him

tenderly as they parted.

The next morning Mr. Melton went to the hospital. He found that Dean had spent a somewhat restless night and that he had considerable fever. His general condition of mind and body seemed not to have changed. The father fed to his son the prescribed spoonful of finely cracked ice, felt his pulse, and his agitation increased when he found that Dr. Singleton had not yet arrived for his morning visit. Stuart, however, was there. He had watched by the bedside all night and seemed worn out with grief and fatigue. He gave his version of the affair and Mr. Melton listened without interruption to his statement. The tired man did not, however, speak with the clearness and feeling that had been so impressive the day before at the trial, and Mr. Melton's only comment was:

"Then a foolish dream has brought about all this sorrow. Sir, this was my only son. He was my hope,—the pride of my old age. I have heard your statement, but I shall never think of you without regret. I shall never see you without suffering. Therefore, it is best that we should separate right here,—now. Your presence will ever remind me of this affair, which will be forever the one great sorrow of my life."

"Mr. Melton," Stuart exclaimed, "do you

realize what you are saying? Dean was the very best friend I had in the world,—why, I loved him like a brother; I would have risked my life for him. You have known me from my earliest childhood! Sir, your state of mind at present must be the result of anxiety and grief. I can understand that; and I would not add one iota to a distress that I have caused. I shall go, sir; but remember that my grief and my distress are not less great than yours. But, before I go, here are some papers and a memorandum book that were in one of Dean's pockets. Good-bye, Mr. Melton. I will go now and see Mary and tell——"

"That will be unnecessary, sir. I can explain to her what you have explained to me. I would prefer that our relations should be broken off at once,—completely and absolutely."

"I shall respect your wishes, sir," replied Stuart.

He turned as he spoke, and left the half-distracted old man bending over his boy.

As Mary came from her room that morning the maid handed her a letter. She hurriedly broke the envelope and read:

"Dearest Mary: I have fully explained to your Father all the details of the sad affair that is now overshadowing our lives. He has said that he desires never to see me again, and that he wishes all relations between the two families broken off. I attribute his harsh decision to his present distress of

mind. I shall accede to his demands, although it grieves me to know that I shall not see you again. I am returning to my home this morning, but I cannot go without telling you that my sorrow is even greater than yours. You know, without my telling you, how I am suffering. May I hope to receive a line from you? If you ever need any service of any kind you may confidently command

"Your sincere friend,

"STUART."

CHAPTER XVI

MARY sent for a messenger.

"Tell Mr. Stuart Maclin that I wish to see him at once."

She awaited his return. Within five minutes her Father entered the room.

"How is Dean, Father?"

"The Doctor hasn't seen him this morning."

The boy returned and said:

"Miss, the clerk says Mr. Maclin settled his bill and left an hour ago,—on the 7:30 train."

"Thank you; that is all."

Glancing at the door, Mr. Melton made sure that the boy had gone, then turning to his daughter he commanded:

"You must break off with Stuart. Henceforth he must go his own way. I can never be reconciled to the sight of him again."

"Why, Father,—Father!" She spoke as if she had not quite understood, or as if she condemned her parent's decision.

"Mary, I can't think of Stuart with any degree of composure. I never want you to mention his name to me again, nor must you see him. You are to break off with him en-

tirely. It is best, Mary, under the circumstances; I feel that it is the only way."

"But, Father, aren't you hard on Stuart? Has he been guilty of any wrong?"

"No matter! Do as I say,—let him alone! It is for the best."

"Your anxiety, sir, has caused you to take an unjust view of this affair. Stuart is innocent; I protest against such treatment. Yet, since you so direct I shall not see him again. But I will answer his note."

"What note?"

"This," and Mary handed it to her father to read.

"Well, answer it if you wish. And tell him what I have commanded, and that you will faithfully comply with my wishes."

"I will, sir, but not without regret. This is too heartless!" And she turned away.

When after breakfast they visited Dean he was still unconscious. Dr. Singleton had reported that he feared concussion of the brain.

Day followed day without any decided change in the patient, except that the fever slightly lessened. Still his mind was not clear.

Time went on. Mary wrote to Stuart at Staunton Hill, and told him of her Father's unalterable command to her. She closed with these words: "My sympathy goes out to you, Stuart."

"Father," Stuart said at the end of his first week at home, "this trouble is too much for me. I cannot sleep. I am worried to death. There is but one hope for me that I can see. I must go away. I must go to work."

"I agree with you, but what will you do?"

"I must go away as soon as possible."

"Where do you wish to go?"

"I haven't quite decided. Perhaps to the West Indies or to South America."

"Very well; go by all means; the trip will do you good. Make your arrangements, my son, and get away as soon as you wish."

"I shall be ready to start within three days, sir."

The following three days were spent in preparing for the trip,—bidding farewell to neighboring friends, writing letters, and packing. On the morning of his departure Stuart went down to the stables to say good-bye to his good old friend there.

"Well, Unc' Abram, I am off on my long trip to-day. I've come to bid you good-bye, and to rub you on your back and wish for luck."

"My boy, is you sho gwine, for a fac'?"

"I shall be off within an hour."

"I hates to see you go, young Marster. Maybe you won't never see me no mo' in dis worl'."

"Oh, you've gone to getting blue now! That'll never do for a game man like you. Why, Unc' Abram, you are only about seventy-three; you'll live twenty years yet."

"I hope de Lord will spar' me till you gits back; I hopes an' prays he may. But if He don't, anyhow I hopes you'll hunt for me when you gits dar."

"Get where, Unc' Abram?"

"I don't know, sir, where; but I'll be in one of 'em somewhere."

"One of what? I don't understand you."

"In one of dem worl's up dar, sir; in one of de many mansions; don't de Scriptur's say: 'In my Father's house are many mansions; an' I go to prepar' a place for you?' "

"Yes, but what has that to do with the stars?"

"Well, sir, I don't know; I'm ign'ant, but I thinks. Some times when I goes out on a clear night I looks up at de stars,—millions and millions of 'em,—an' I sees 'em reflectin' de glory of heaven, an' I thinks to myself, I does, dat de Lord is wise, he made evvything for a purpose; de millions an' millions of souls dat leave dis worl' is got to have a suitable place to go to. Some is good, an' some is bad; an' de sheep an' de goats can't be put all together; an' 'One star,' says de Scriptur', 'differs from another star;' so dar's a place for

all at las', an' a fit place, too; millions of worl's for millions of souls. Don't de wise men say dat evvy one of dem stars is a worl'; don't dey say dat?"

"Yes, so they declare, Unc' Abram. And they go further; they prove absolutely that all the heavenly bodies are always in their places, and that such as move are regular in their paths; each always governed by some other heavenly body, just as our World here is governed in its course by the Sun. There can be no doubt that an all-wise, all-powerful entity made and governs all the worlds of the Universe."

"An', sir, if He made man in His own likeness, den He mus' have made him de mos' important of all de things He made; an' if he's de best of all His wucks made in de beginnin', den it's natchul dat man should have, when he leaves here, de pick of all de good worl's of de Universe."

"Your reasoning certainly seems to conform to common sense, Unc' Abram."

"Yes, sir; common sense is all a ign'ant man is got to fall back on. If he ain't got dat, he ain't got nuthin' to him sca'sely; not even a soul,—dat is, he ain't got a soul big enough to count. He'll have to be sent to one of dem little bits of out of de way worl's, whar he won't be in de way of folks dat's got de ambi-

tion to git along an' improve deyselves, accordin' to de wise plans of de Scriptur'."

"Well, Unc' Abram, if we don't go to the same world, I shall certainly miss you."

"Yes, sir. Maybe if I'm humble and faithful in all my wucks in de one I gits to, den I mought after a while hear de pernouncement: 'Well done, good an' faithful servant! Step up higher! Take a higher seat in de synagogue!' An' dat would mean I'd git a transfer up to your worl'. I hopes so; an' I'll wuck to dat en'."

"But, Unc' Abram, Mammy Liza will be with you; you wouldn't leave her."

"Oh, no, sir,—oh, no! She'll be worl's furter on an' higher up den you an' me. An' I'll never res' till I gits to her."

"She is certainly safe somewhere, Unc' Abram. She's in heaven, if any soul ever went there from this world."

"She's dar, sir, sho'; she come an' tol' me she was; an' she's happy,—dat is, when she's dar. But when she comes back here an' sees how some folks is a-doin', she gits distressed like, she say."

"Who's worrying her, Unc' Abram?"

"Some of her folks she lef' here. But dar ain't no use to talk to 'em, nor 'bout 'em. Dey's jined to dey idols; an' de Scriptur' say: 'Let 'em alone.'"

"I suppose you think, Unc' Abram, that

> 'Some of these nights, about twelve o'clock,
> When this old world begins to reel and rock,'

they'll be like Pharoah's army."

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir! dat's it. Dey sho' got sumfen comin' to 'em. Dey ain't satisfied to run de folks here half 'stracted, but dey worries de saints in heaven."

"Unc' Abram, did Mammy really come back to you, or was it just a dream?"

"She come to me as a sperit in de night, an' I seed 'er, an' I talked wid 'er. Onliest las' week she come ag'in; an' she say: 'Abram, go to my boy an' tell him de Lord knows he ain't done no intenshal harm to nobody; tell him not to 'stress hisself; dat de Lord 'livered his chillen out of trouble in days of ol' an' He'll do it ag'in.' "

"Thank you, Unc' Abram. If Mammy comes to you again, tell her I treasure her memory. She is one soul I hope to meet in Heaven. Good-bye! My time is up."

They embraced, and Stuart walked slowly up the hill toward the house as Unc' Abram sat on a large stone and watched his every departing step with his old and failing eyes.

Three days later Stuart Maclin was on the Atlantic, sailing toward Brazil.

CHAPTER XVII

ONE year had passed since Mr. Acee entered the law school of the University. He had at once taken a high stand in his classes, not only because he was a diligent student but because he possessed a mind well able to grasp the fine points of pleading and the nice distinctions that the scales of justice are capable of apportioning with delicate accuracy. The intense fire of ambition burned within him,—whatever ambition might be. Often he asked himself the question, "What is ambition?" And self-confidence answered, "Certainly not the glorious cheat it has been called." Then he would dream on: "I'll go to the top of the ladder step by step; and some day I'll look down upon a conquered world. There stands Fortune,—she shall be mine; there stands Fame,—she beckons on. I shall arrive in time. Patience! Patience! All will be mine! And the girl! Oh! she, too, is for me,—for me alone; at whatever cost, she too shall be mine."

Mr. Acee was meditating in this fashion

one April as he took from his pocket a letter. He held it listlessly in his hand as his eyes gazed through the open window at the buds of early spring on the branches of the overhanging limbs.

"This is straightforward and earnest enough," he mused. "It is certainly a candid letter. I shall always know just what progress I am making with her. If one plan doesn't work I shall try another. A man who is not resourceful isn't fit to be a lawyer. The success of a scheme depends on the planning. Scheming is the work of the intellect; execution is but the work of the physical body. But her letters are too sad to suit me. I'll get her out of that frame of mind. Let's see this again," and he opened the letter and read:

"My dear Mr. Acee: Your letter of last Wednesday gave me much pleasure. I am so glad to hear that you feel confident of passing your examinations successfully. I shall watch your career in life with a great deal of interest; and I believe you will succeed in whatever you undertake.

"I know you will sympathise with us deeply when I tell you that poor, dear Dean is no better. He eats and sleeps normally; but his mind remains clouded. He sits and talks to himself for hours at a time—merely in disconnected phrases. Dr. Gross holds out but little hope for his ultimate recovery. He says that the long fever has left his mind impaired in some way. We shall keep him here all summer under this skilful specialist, hoping that something may be done to bring our old Dean back to us. Oh, the burden of this calamity! How gladly would I exchange with the dear boy. How much less would the world miss me,—a poor, weak woman! Father seems crushed; the blow, I fear, will undermine his health. He speaks as if nothing were left to him on earth. How my heart

aches for my dear Father! But enough for the present. Write me whenever you can spare the time. You are about the only one of Dean's old friends left to whom I can pour out my heart about him.

"Ever your sincere friend,

"MARY."

Acee said to himself as he folded it: "I'll have to cheer her up, if possible, and let her feel that she still has something to live for in this fine old world. The old gentleman is taking things hard. A man of his age can't stand the knocks of adversity like a young fellow. He'd better look out for himself or he'll be gone before he knows it. I know he'll be sorry to leave all those bonds and stocks and negroes,—to say nothing of the grand principality of Broadcastle. My! But this dreaming won't do for me! I must get to work."

And he grasped his mammoth volume of Blackstone, and turned the pages over slowly, reading the book in review of certain portions that he feared might possibly have become hazy in his memory.

Suddenly there was a rap at his door.

"Come in!"

"Hello, Mason! Sit down," said Acee, as his guest, a dissipated fellow-student, entered. This Mason was from the far South, a student of the University, with whom Acee had several times gone out at night to frolic.

"What odds do you offer me, Acee?" inquired Mason.

"Odds? Odds? Why, none at all. I'm not anxious for the bet; the chances seem to me to be against Timekeeper. Those New Yorkers are right 'up to snuff' in their training methods; so if they bet their money you know they feel pretty sure of winning. You no doubt appreciate the fact that the extra weight that Timekeeper will be penalized with will set heavily on him when a good three-year-old,—carrying light weight and thoroughly fit,—looks him full in the eye for a mile and a quarter."

"Nevertheless I would like to make a small bet on the race, if I can get the right odds," replied Mason.

"Aren't you satisfied with even money? You won't be able to get as good as that if you wait much longer. As soon as the New Yorkers have covered all the money that Timekeeper's Southern friends want to wager on him, then down will go the odds. I'm going to wait a while,—until a few days before the race,—and then I'll get better odds than I'm now offering you."

"I'll bet you a thousand even, right now, that your horse doesn't win the race," the visitor ventured.

"No, no! I'll not bet even money against

the field. Name your horse against Timekeeper."

"Well, I'll bet you a thousand even money," declared Mason, "that Abaddon beats Timekeeper in the race on June 15th."

"It's a go. I accept. But both horses must start, of course," returned Acee. "Shall we draw our checks and leave them in the hands of a friend?"

"Yes, if you say so."

The checks were drawn and deposited as agreed, with a student, who happened to be passing down the colonnade at the time.

"Won't you join me in a pipe, Mason? This is first-class tobacco; and here's a clean fig-stem pipe."

"I was just longing for a smoke," Mason readily acquiesced.

"Now, Mason," continued Acee in a friendly way, "as our bet has been made and nothing either of us might say or do would change it, tell me what you really know about Abaddon. Why do you back him to win the stake?"

"Just this, old man: Hopper, of my class, is the son of the owner of Abaddon; he tells me that his father thinks his horse will surely win, —that he has the best trainer in the country in charge of his horses, and that the trainer declares that the horse will win to a moral certainty, barring accidents; that he has

shown him already the best mile trial he ever saw in his life. He believes the horse could take up twenty pounds above his allotted weight and easily defeat any other eligible horse in the race. Mr. Hopper intends to bet heavily on Abaddon, and I would advise you to hedge your bet. You can't fail to lose."

"What else do you know? Has the horse ever beaten a good horse in an actual race? He may be one of those blooming morning-glories that curl up as soon as it gets hot."

"No; your guess is wrong. The horse has been tried against good, first-class stake horses. He came from behind in the stretch last week, under whip and spur, and beat a horse a year older,—a horse that had won several large stakes last season about New York. They say they have tested the new star, Abaddon, in every possible way, and that they contemplate sending him to race in England during the fall. They have entered him there in several stakes already, and they intend to put him in every event there to which he may be eligible, —from a mile and a quarter up to two and a quarter miles."

"Timekeeper," interrupted Acee, "belongs to a friend of mine, who is a man of sound judgment when it's a question of horses. He thinks his horse Timekeeper will win. Well, we shall see!"

"That's good tobacco, Acee," the Southerner commented, knocking out the ashes and laying the pipe aside. "You know tobacco, but horses—well, you'd better hedge on that bet. You'll lose. Good-bye! I must be going."

Mason having gone, Acee continued blowing rings of tobacco smoke in the air, while he thought over the wager and over his possible chances of loss.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE session had ended. The students were packing their trunks, and were manifesting unusual haste; the streets of the little village were alive with more than double the ordinary number of young men, bent on returning visits of friends, settling scores of every nature, social and financial, and preparing for the next scene in life's drama. Mr. Acee had passed his examinations with honor, and his self-satisfaction contributed considerably to his happiness.

"Staunton Hill for me as soon as possible!" he said as he packed his grip.

Without any delay Acee reached Staunton Hill.

"Well, well, I do declar'! How you do, Mr. Kirkman?" Unc' Abram extended his eager hand as the prospective lawyer stepped under the shed of the training stable at Staunton Hill.

"Very well, I thank you, Unc' Abram," replied Acee, shaking the old negro's outheld hand. "How is everything, old man?"

"Jus' toler'ble, thank you, sir. Is you well?"

"Always well and in good spirits. How are your horses? Your stakehorse, is he doing well?"

"Jus' come an' look at 'im; he's sho' a pictur'." And the proud old man led the way to the stall.

"He does look good; his coat is live and sappy, and he's carrying plenty of flesh. But when is the Colonel coming back? I came by the house and they told me that he was away somewhere."

"I looks for 'im Sunday, sir. He been away three or four days. We want to start wid Timekeeper to fill his big 'gagement 'bout nex' Monday."

"Unc' Abram, what's the news from Stuart? Is he coming home any time soon?"

"Lord, Lord, Mr. Kirkman; nobody don't know when 'e comin'. He writ Marster he was well, an' all de like of dat. But 'e ain't say nothin' yet 'bout 'turnin' home. I don't see what make 'im stay 'way so long. I wish 'e would come. De Lord knows we all loves 'im well enough, an' wants to see 'im."

"Yes, indeed we do. He has a great many friends. He's a big-hearted boy,—so honest and straightforward."

"Ain't you heared from him, Mr. Kirkman?"

"Not recently; I'll have a letter from him soon, maybe. A great boy, that Stuart! And he thinks so much of you, Unc' Abram. I believe you could influence him to do almost anything, with the honest way you have of telling all the truth and with all your good intentions. It's a great thing for a man to have friends; it's a great thing to keep them, too; and the best way to do that is not to talk too much. When one does a thing you don't exactly understand, don't go to other people and talk about him. Keep quiet and think over it; probably you will understand your friend's intention after a time. A still tongue is always found in a wise head."

"Dat's de trufe, sir! Sho' it is."

"Now, that leads up to a thing of importance I've come all the way here especially to say to you. You know I'm not superstitious; I don't believe that dead folks ever come back to this world,—certainly not unless there's something of the greatest importance to tell,—something that couldn't possibly he known without some such mysterious revelation. When they do come there must be some good reason,—some good, sound, important reason. Now this is what I came to say to you: your horse, Timekeeper, will not win the stake you expect to run him in on the fifteenth of this month; and I'll tell you the——"

"Wait a minit, please, sir; what make you say dat?"

"I was just going on to tell you. I have it from a reliable man, just from New York, that a horse named Abaddon,—eligible to the race and owned by a millionaire there,—has recently worked the fastest mile ever shown in the United States. The horse worked in the company of a well proven stake horse and came from behind in the stretch under whip and spur, winning handily with big weight up. They say he is a world beater, and they are going to take him to England immediately after this race. He is entered in all the important stakes there. His owner, under the advice of his trainer, who is said to be the best in this country, is going to bet a fortune on this race. This advice is reliable,—that I know. All the parties are personally known to me; I have the information from a straight source. You haven't a chance in the world to win the race. Abaddon's trainer says he could carry twenty pounds more weight than he'll have to carry in this race, and still win by as far as a man could throw a rock. That would be fifty lengths. That's a great distance at the end of a race. It makes the losing horse look like a bad penny,—counterfeit."

The old negro had grunted time and again while Acee narrated the great points of Abad-

don. Then he asked, "You knows all dat, Mr. Kirkman?"

"Yes, I have it from a perfectly reliable source. It's such a pity, too, for you all have had unbounded confidence in Timekeeper."

"Boun' to have it, sir; boun' to have it! He ain't been beat by no horse in three years." The old trainer entered Timekeeper's stall, ran his fingers down the horse's fore legs, then looked into the water bucket, and, throwing the blanket forward, stood back a step to survey the animal's form.

"Didn't you tell the Colonel more than a month ago that the horse was doing fine and training perfectly?"

"Certainly, sir; sho'ly I did. An' he's good dis minit. Dey ain't no doubt 'bout dat."

"Well, on the strength of your assurance the Colonel went to Washington, I hear, and made a conditional wager of a big sum of money. But this is a secret, so you mustn't mention it! It was away up in the many thousands and thousands. He bet that Timekeeper would win if he started in the race. I hope you'll tell him what I've heard. Tell him that the information is reliable. And tell him too that I regret not having met him here, and that I came especially to see him and you, to give this information. It may be worth thousands of dollars to him; and it may save your reputa-

tion, too, Unc' Abram, as well as that of Timekeeper."

"Thanky, sir; I'll tell 'im jus' as soon as 'e gits here."

"I suppose I can get into the house and stay here to-night. It's too late for me to leave now."

"Yes, sir! Oh, yes, sir. 'Twon't be no trouble 'bout dat,—jus' de same as if Marster was here."

"Well, as it's getting late I'll walk on up to the house. Good night, Unc' Abram."

"Good night, Mr. Kirkman. Ain't you gwine to come down ag'in in de mornin'?"

"Yes, I'll come down to the stable and tell you good-bye before I leave."

Immediately after breakfast the next morning Acee hurried to the training stables.

"Unc' Abram, I feel awfully blue this morning," began Acee. "I always feel the after effects when anything disturbs me in my sleep. Did you ever have the spirit of a departed friend come back to you in the night?"

"Dat I is, sir; many times."

"Well, one came to me last night. It was a bright shining spirit, and in robes of white, with glowing hair, and eyes that shone like glittering diamonds. The white wings were outstretched, and they reached nearly across the room from side to side."

"Yes, Lord! de angel,—de angel of de Lord, sho' an' mighty. Dat's sho' who 'twas," exclaimed the old man, whose imagination had run well up with Acee's pictured apparition. " 'Twan't nothin' but jus' dat, for a fac'."

"Well, I don't like to tell you, because it spoke facts that neither of us like to hear about."

"What it say, Mr. Kirkman?"

"Nothing pleasant, Unc' Abram; and I don't like to be carrying messages that tell of misfortunes to my good, faithful friends."

"You can tell me, sir. I likes to know what's a-comin', so I can make 'lowance for it."

"Unc' Abram, I think I ought to tell you, as it seriously concerns you. The spirit said: 'Hail, thou sleeper! Awake! Give the message to the faithful servant of his Master that the victory he covets is already lost. I have ordained it wisely otherwise.' "

"Yes, Lord! Yes, Lord!" exclaimed the old slave, thoroughly wrought up.

"Then the vision noiselessly disappeared,—how I could not tell. It was like the wind that the Scriptures say 'bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.' Such is the purport of my last night's experience, Unc' Abram. Can you make anything out of it?"

The old man gave a groan, and gazed intently on the ground for a moment, then, looking at the lawyer over his spectacles with a troubled expression, he asked:

"Please, sir, tell me de message ag'in."

"The words were these, and I shall never forget them while I live: 'Hail, thou sleeper! Awake! Give the message to the faithful servant of his Master that the victory he covets is already lost. I have ordained it wisely otherwise.' "

The old man for a few moments remained silent, his gaze fixed upon the ground. Then he repeated: "The victory is lost; de Lord done fixed it notherwise. Pity! pity! pity! Nothin' short of de Lord could of tuck dat race away from dis good horse."

"You have probably interpreted the dream correctly, Unc' Abram." Acee's assumption of seriousness was very impressive; and the old trainer knew nothing of acting; his instinct was too primitively honest to fathom sham,—his intentions too sincere to suspect duplicity.

"I have seriously considered the words," continued the young lawyer, "and I can interpret their meaning in no other way than have you; 'faithful servant' could mean no one but you and the 'victory coveted' must refer to the race you had hoped and earnestly desired to win."

"Dey don't mean nothin' else, sir; it's dat

for sho'," and the old man's words carried a world of regret in them.

"Now, Unc' Abram, I have something important to say. It rests with you to use the knowledge you have, and protect your good Master."

"I always looks out for Marster."

"Now I am going to leave it in your hands, Unc' Abram. The Colonel will lose that big bet only in the event the horse starts in the race."

"You's a good friend o' my young Marster, God bless 'im, an' I knows you wants to help us."

"Good-bye, Unc' Abram, I'm going back to the University now."

And, cordially shaking the old trainer's hand, Acee departed.

CHAPTER XIX

COLONEL MACLIN returned to Staunton Hill on the following Monday. The old trainer made no delay in communicating the information concerning Abaddon's great showing in his trials. With great care he told the Colonel every particular of that horse's sensational work, and he called attention to the fact that Mr. Acee had come all the way from his studies in order to put them on their guard. He concluded by suggesting the wisdom of "scratching" Timekeeper from the race.

"We are too old in this business, Abram," replied the Colonel, "to listen to hearsay. The horse Abaddon may be,—and probably is,—good; but we have a good horse, too; indeed, we have what we know to be a first-class horse. He has proved that often—often; proved it to the satisfaction of every one; when fit, he has a good chance to beat any horse in the country,—bar none. I'm afraid you have lost

your nerve, Abram. Can't you learn a lesson from the horse you train, and have a little courage in emergencies? You never saw him show a faint heart in your life. You have loved him for just that noble quality; yet you are ready to listen to reports,—for all we know, lying reports,—put out by gamblers. We will give him a try-out to-morrow morning, and if he shows he's at himself now, we'll run him, Abaddon or no Abaddon."

"Marster, you ain't never run ag'inst dem New York folks yit. De horse is a horse all by hisse'f down dis way; but if 'e don't beat dat Abajon jus' think how bad we'll feel; jus' think of all de bad cornsequences!"

"That's all right! Your reasons are sound, but your nerve seems to be gone. We'll try him to-morrow. If he's right he'll start."

The Colonel spoke with the confidence of his convictions. There was no "yellow streak" in his anatomy. He had often met such situations before, and he discounted flying reports. He had a first-class horse, and he knew it.

"Yes, sir; but I hopes you won't make no big money loss on de race," replied the old slave, acquiescing in his Master's wishes, and at the same time intentionally framing his reply to remind him of the enormous conditional wager that Acee had said the Colonel had made in Washington, and to which the old servant did

not dare refer in the presence of his Master.

"Save the horse, Abram, until I come down to-morrow morning. Have him saddled and ready at seven o'clock, when I expect to be here; we'll try him and see whether he is fit."

"Yes, sir!"

The Colonel then walked briskly up the steep hill to the house.

Unc' Abram ambled along down to the far end of the stable shed, and leaned against the last post in the row, looking intently at the ground beneath his feet; then, shaking his head slowly, he mumbled to himself:

"I hates for Marster to lose all dat money. If he knowed what's gwine to happen he wouldn't nother. If I was to tell 'im what I knows he'd be a-callin' me er ign'ant ole fool; and den he'd go on an' lose his money, jus' de same. 'Twould n't do no good to tell 'im. But, I sho' hates to see 'im lose all dat big money; an' he's gwine to lose it, providin' de horse shows hisse'f right in de mornin'. If a nigger can't look out for his Marster's intrust, he ain't no count to 'im, nohow. De horse gits a big feed of oats to-night, wid a rack chock-full of hay; an' 'fo' day in de mornin' jus' de same ag'in; he'll git two buckets of water too; he can't show nuthin' of any account wid all dat stuff in 'im 'fo' 'e starts in de trial to-morrow. Tell de faithful servant of

his Marster dat de race is already los'; yes, Lord! I hears de word!"

"Moses! Moses! Moses!" yelled the Colonel from his front porch, calling the mail boy, who had arrived some minutes before, as the old gentleman knew, and whom he suspected of loitering at play somewhere out of sight instead of delivering the mail promptly.

Moses came at a run, taking off his hat, and he handed the bag to his master, who berated him for his trifling delay in handing in the important mail.

"Go and get your dinner, sir!" ordered the Colonel, while he slipped open the mouth of the cotton cloth bag, closed by a draw-string.

Running over the letters hastily, he stopped further search as a letter bearing a foreign stamp attracted his attention. It was from Stuart. The papers and other letters dropped to the floor.

With impatience he cut open the envelope and read.

MANAOS, BRAZIL,
May 2, 185—.

"DEAR FATHER: Since writing to you from Para I have been studying medical conditions here in their relation to the poor, and my study has determined me in the choice of a career. I have resolved to atone for the injury I have done to one by devoting my future life to the good of many.

"I expect to go farther into the interior in a day or two, in order to acquaint myself more fully with conditions here.

"I shall then go either to Paris, or to New York, to study medicine, with a view to returning here to work among these people. A life spent in relieving suffering will help me to forget the past.

"I shall be gone from this country before this letter reaches you. So it will be useless for you to write to me until you receive my address in my next letter.

"Good-bye, dear Father. Tell Unc' Abram that his boy always remembers him.

"Ever your devoted son,

"STUART."

CHAPTER XX

MARY MELTON'S order was that she was to be called at half after five in the morning. The family still occupied the house in Philadelphia that Mr. Melton had leased in order to give Dean a comfortable home, and to have him under the care of the eminent physician, Dr. Gross.

"I am going to market early to-morrow morning to find something that may tempt Dean's appetite," she said, looking at her father, who sat in his study gown and beaded buckskin moccasins reading before the open window of the family sitting room.

"The doctor says he needs building up in strength more than anything else, daughter. If you can tempt him to eat heartily it will do him a great deal of good."

"It distresses me to see how little he eats, father. I prepare the daintiest dishes for him, but he frequently pushes them aside untouched."

"It gratifies me to see you show such tender concern for your brother, Mary," Mr. Melton said consolingly, as he reached out his hand to her and drew her gently down to kiss her rosy lips.

The girl's face became less troubled, for her father's approval calmed her, and in token of thanks her soft fingers caressed his scattering gray locks as she stood by his chair.

"Father, you are so good to me!" was all she said, but her appreciation of his praise showed in the continued gentle strokes of her hands over his whitening hair.

"You are my only hope now, my daughter," the old man murmured softly. "I'm afraid Dean will never recover. He has not appreciably improved so far as I can see. Surely, if there was not something radically wrong with him, he would have shown improvement by this time." And the old gentleman hung his head and seemed to be overcome with emotion.

"Oh, father! let us continue to hope. Perhaps some day the Lord will show his mercy by putting into the brain of some specialist the knowledge that will cure our loved one. I always hope for that with all my heart,—that science will liberate poor Dean from this terrible, dark cloud that hangs over his mind. I shall pray the Lord to send him a deliverer.

Probably as—hush!" she said, holding up her hand, and listening intently. "I hear a noise in his room; I will go to him at once."

She hurriedly left her father, to go upstairs to Dean, who rarely arose from his chair.

As she entered the room she found him standing by the mantel, with his arm resting on it, gazing out of the window as if lost in abstraction.

"What do you want, precious?" she asked him in a modulated voice, filled with the tenderness one uses in speaking to a child.

Dean turned his head slowly toward her and said something so indistinctly that she did not catch it. She repeated her question, and he raised his hand slightly toward her and made a motion as if he wished to write something. She asked him again:

"What do you want?"

He continued to motion his hand as before.

"You shall have it," she said.

She opened a small drawer of the chiffonier, and taking out a pencil and paper, handed them to him.

He slowly wrote the word "Stuart," then he listlessly laid the pencil and paper on the mantel and started toward his bed.

She took his arm and supported him to the bed. Then she sat by his side fanning him gently until he fell asleep.

As she sat there memories crowded thick and fast upon her.

"This world is so full of trouble,—of heart-breaking sorrows,—of anxieties of every kind," she thought. "I feel sometimes as if I could not stand the sight of the poor boy's helplessness,—as if I must go away unless I wish to follow in his steps." She arose and quietly left the room.

CHAPTER XXI

THREE years went by. The Meltons were still in Philadelphia and Dean had continued under Dr. Gross' constant care, but no hope of his recovery had been held out.

The three years had brought about few changes.

Mr. Acee, after graduating in law with distinction, had settled in Richmond, and business was beginning to come to him. He had made many acquaintances among business and professional men; and the older lawyers at the bar showed recognition of his ability by employing him to assist them in important cases. He had recently been elected a member of a social club,—but study,—deep study of the law,—was still his ruling passion. He wrote frequently to Mary Melton, and frequently reminded her of his sympathy and of his love.

Unc' Abram still looked after the thoroughbred horses and their training at Staunton Hill, with the same faithfulness as of old; and when his master failed of a morning to call at

the stable the old slave went as soon as possible to inquire after the Colonel's health and spirits. He often said, "You's all I's got lef' now, Marster, since Liza an' young Marster's done gone."

Timekeeper still occupied his old-time box-stall, and he was yet sound for racing. He had won in all his starts throughout North Carolina and Virginia during the past three years; but probably if he had filled that stake engagement with Abaddon there might have been a different story to tell.

But the filling of that engagement was out of the question after the showing he had made in his trial at home, and Colonel Maclin had him "scratched" from the race.

Unc' Abram always maintained that Timekeeper would have won the race but for the "interference of Providence," as he put it.

Stuart had completed his medical course. On the day after receiving his diploma he entered upon the duties of assistant surgeon in the New York Casualty Hospital, where he intended remaining for a year or two while taking a post-graduate course. As he had shown special talent for surgery he had been advised to make it his specialty. His imagination dwelt on hitherto untried operations and their consequences. Practical experience

familiarized him with the delicacy and intricacies of surgery and he had read every important work on the subject.

From Colonel Maclin he had heard that Dean was in Philadelphia with his father and sister, and that Dr. Gross had pronounced his case hopeless. Gladly would Stuart have gone to his old friend; gladly would he have devoted his life to that service; but fate, or rather the stubborn father of the wounded boy, still kept him away.

Mr. Melton,—whose affairs at Broadcastle and whose business affairs everywhere were sadly in need of his personal attention,—determined at length to lay the situation before Mary.

"Daughter, I am constantly in receipt of letters telling me of things going radically wrong at Broadcastle; my business affairs are getting badly out of joint. As you know, I have various interests and investments, all of which require my attention. It will be impossible for me to remain here much longer. I must go and look after my business. For nearly three years I have spent practically all my time here in Philadelphia until business matters have gone half crazy. What shall we do about,—I mean with,—Dean?"

"Just what you think best, Father. Dean has made no improvement here. Probably you

might find a place for him in a private sanitarium, where he would receive the best of care, and still be under the treatment of a skilled physician."

"I will see Dr. Gross; perhaps he can suggest some such place," said Mr. Melton. "I will see him to-day."

Within a few days Dean was removed to Dr. Bache's private hospital on the Hudson near New York. After satisfying themselves that the patient was in thoroughly competent hands and that he would receive the most careful attention, Mr. Melton and Mary bade the poor boy an affectionate farewell and left New York to return to Broadcastle.

As they were to pass through Richmond Mr. Melton, at his daughter's request, telegraphed Mr. Acee the hour at which they would arrive and told him that they would stay at the Exchange Hotel.

Mr. Acee met his old friends on their arrival.

"I am so glad to see you again!" was his cordial greeting, while his face was alight with smiles. "How long will you be in Richmond, Mr. Melton?"

"Only to-day. We leave early to-morrow morning for Broadcastle."

"And Dean,—how is he?"

"No improvement, Mr. Acee."

"Too bad! I had hoped he would improve with the opening of spring."

Mr. Melton soon excused himself, as he had important business affairs to attend to before the banks closed for the day. He promised, however, to return by half after five.

"Do you know, Miss Mary," declared the lawyer when the two were left alone, "that, in spite of all the encouragement I am receiving here in my profession, I still feel dissatisfied with life, for you know that I measure the sum of happiness by the hope of winning you."

"Then you are meeting with success! I'm so glad." Mary was determined to ignore the personal note.

"Oh, yes, I'm forging ahead quite as fast as a young lawyer could hope to go. Within a short while I shall be in a position to come to you and ask fulfilment of your promise."

"Oh, now, Mr. Lawyer," she replied lightly, "don't commit me to anything rash in your statement of what I promised you."

"Ah, but you committed yourself, didn't you?"

"Lawyers are not allowed to ask leading questions."

"Does that forbid my asking you the all-important question?"

"You remember I predicted your ultimate success in whatever you undertook seriously."

Mr. Acee thought a propitious moment had arrived to confess his modest opinion of himself, whether he believed what he said or not. He felt assured that he would work into a successful practice, and that in itself would speak more eloquently of his worth than all his words. He saw that he had been too forward in referring so boldly to Mary's promise made three years before. And he knew she had only promised to consider him seriously when and after he had proved himself worthy.

"It is very consoling and encouraging to a man to be assured of the confidence of the woman he loves," he said. "I shall work and study all the harder to fulfil your expectations. I'm hewing to the line, hoping you'll see the chips fall and use them to kindle a little warmth in your heart. For I perceive that your heart is like a tender flower; it quickly chills in an uncongenial atmosphere; it must be kept under glass, watered gently with tepid, misty sprays and tonicked with the sun's soft rays."

The lawyer spoke, with a smile on his face, and with twinkling eyes that sought to tease, and Mary took his words as nothing more than badinage; so smiling, she said:

"Why, Mr. Acee, I really believe you ought to have been a poet instead of a lawyer."

"But poets are usually failures. And you

have told me that you cannot be won except by success."

"Don't let us look too far into the future, Mr. Acee."

So when Mary and Mr. Melton left for Broadcastle the next morning Mr. Acee realized that he had not gained a single point in the most important case of his life.

CHAPTER XXII

MR. ACEE made it a rule to seek the acquaintance of business men. He lost no opportunity to impress his ability as a lawyer on members of the bar; and, because of strict attention to business entrusted to him, his practice increased rapidly. When not employed in the preparation or in the conduct of a case he spent much time in examining the musty records at the clerk's office. Old papers of administrators, executors, and guardians were pored over by him; the land-title books, too, were objects of his special investigation. He took notes as he progressed with his researches, and always satisfied himself that all the details of settlement of estates were duly covered by authentic vouchers on file with the papers in the clerk's office. Whenever questioned as to the object of his zealous searches, he would reply that he was familiarizing himself with the records and with the past business of the courts and of the community.

The truth was that he sought to find new business for himself. Knowing the carelessness of his brother lawyers, he took the chance of unearthing a case. He figured that the subsequent deaths of some of the parties to the irregular transaction, inability to produce requisite evidence, disappearance of important witnesses, and the fallibility of men's memories contributed to the possibility of sustaining an action that might win a handsome contingent fee for the prosecuting lawyer. To stumble thus on a case that might "pan-out" a snug fortune was the trump card that he hoped to play some day.

"The old gray-headed proverb about the fellow that waits has at last come true," concluded our young lawyer, as he probed a certain case that lay before him on the court records. "My chance has 'arriv,'—at last,—at last."

Walking down the hallway to an office a few doors from his own, he entered.

"Hello, Wylie!" He greeted Mr. T. Wylie Smith, a young lawyer who had practically nothing to do but to read, smoke, and "swop lies." But he was eager for business; he wanted a case. Mr. Acee knew him to be a shrewd young fellow; so he concluded to use him as a tool.

"Come over to my office for a few moments,

Wylie; I want to have a talk with you at once."

"Sit there for a moment, Wylie." Acee pointed to a chair near his desk. "I wish to say this to you: I have a case of considerable importance, involving a large amount of money; but for reasons unnecessary to be explained now I do not care to identify myself with it. It is a good case,—a perfectly plain case in which the statutes will sustain the contention, for no precedents exist to give grounds for technical defense. Now, to be brief, would you care to take the case?"

"Certainly,—jump at it. What case is it?"

"You've got to agree to two conditions, Wylie. First, that the fact of my being connected with it, either directly or indirectly, is to be kept secret; second, that I must receive one-half of what you may receive for your services. I shall be ready at all times during progress of the case to render you assistance in the way of advice; but no one must know that. The case is to be yours, and yours only, so far as the world may know."

"The conditions are satisfactory; you can state the case." The over-eager Mr. Wylie Smith was disposed to hurry matters.

"Wait a few moments. I'll draw a contract between us; this is a case of considerable importance."

Mr. Acee soon drew the contract in the form of a letter from lawyer Smith to lawyer Acee.

As an evidence of Mr. Acee's ability to take care of himself, the letter is given, as follows:

"MR. KIRKMAN ACEE: Having learned facts in regard to imperfect title to the property now being worked by the Eureka Kaoline Company, and having decided to take action for recovery in the interest of one Jacob Skelton, Jr., I write to say that I should be pleased to have your co-operation, or advice, in the conduct of the case. I feel sure that together we can win. In the event that you cannot actively join me, I shall be satisfied to have your advice; and for such aid I will allow you one-half of whatever compensation I shall receive from the case. It is my intention to take the case from Skelton on a contingency fee, fifty per cent. of the amount gained by the action. As the property is worth probably one hundred thousand dollars you may earn a nice fee by joining me as above proposed. Please advise me promptly of your decision.

"Yours very truly,
"T. WYLIE SMITH."

"Copy that, Wylie, in your own hand, sign it and give it to me," requested Mr. Acee.

That having been done, Acee destroyed the original, putting the Smith copy in his own desk, endorsed:

"DEAR SIR: I accept your proposition to the extent of advising you in the case.

"Respectfully yours,
"KIRKMAN ACEE."

While Acee was putting the letter in his desk he began to explain his subtle plan.

"The facts in the case are these,—wait. Before I go further I wish to impress upon

you again that this is now your case; under no circumstances are you to reveal to anyone that I have had any connection with it, first or last. Do you understand?"

"Certainly! certainly! I shall respect your wishes,—not to mention my own contract with you, Mr. Acee."

"All right, then. I find, in searching the records at the Court House, that a deed to the Kaoline property was made to the Eureka Company by Jacob Skelton, Sr., about fifteen years ago. That deed recites that the property in question had been owned by the mother of Jacob Skelton, Jr., prior to her death, and that at her death it had descended to Jacob Skelton, Jr., her son. That for and in consideration of another tract of land mentioned and of a certain small sum of money, paid in cash, the said Jacob Skelton, Jr., had transferred by another contemporaneous deed all his right and title in the Kaoline property to Jacob Skelton, Sr., his father. But upon examination no such deed from Jacob, Jr., to Jacob, Sr., is on record. Although the deed to the Eureka Company by Jacob, Sr., recites that the deed from Jacob, Jr., to Jacob, Sr., has been made contemporaneously, yet it states what is not a fact, so far as the records show. Therefore the property is lawfully the property of Jacob, Jr. He has never parted with

his title by any recorded deed; and, unless the parties in interest can produce such deed the property with all the present improvements can easily be won by you for Jacob, Jr. The Eureka Company will neither have a leg to stand on nor the land to stand a leg on if it had one."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Wylie Smith.

"Wylie," continued Mr. Acee, "you must act discreetly in this matter. What you must do is this: Catch Jacob when he is just sober enough to make a bargain; and, without explaining to him any of the particulars, have him sign a witnessed agreement, turning over the case to you on a contingent fee of half the amount realized."

"That can easily be done," replied Wylie. "He's a drunken sot; one-half of the amount involved in this case will be enough to keep him drunk all the rest of his life, he will reason to himself; and so he will be glad to enter into the bargain. I shall have the advantage of him in knowing where the case lies; he'll be in the dark. He'll come to terms gladly, I am sure. If he does not, he will not know enough to impart the facts to another. It is only a question with me whether it will be right to give him half. He would only stay drunk the longer."

"Well! do the best you can. I think it would not be philanthropic to give him so much as

half. Suppose you tell him you will take the case for half, if he will put up two hundred dollars in cash for costs. He couldn't raise two hundred cents,—not to save his soul. After you say to him that you will advance the costs, if he will give you another fourth of the amount, he'll readily agree to it, as it will be that much to him, or nothing. I really think that would be the height of philanthropy, all things considered."

"I think so, too," replied Mr. Smith, putting on his hat and preparing to leave Acee's office to find his man.

"But, wait a moment, Wylie! Find Jacob, on the street,—on the street, *alone*,—mind you. Engage him in conversation and take a stroll with him. Take pains to pass this way, and when at my door invite him to drop in here with you that you may explain the matter to him. I do not desire to be identified with the case, but during your conference I might make a few disinterested remarks that might be profitable to you both. I am too busily engaged in the preparation of an important case to be of much benefit to either of you just now, however."

So, taking the cue, in shyster style, off slipped Wylie.

"Well, Smith, how are you to-day?" Lawyer

Acee hailed him in an abstracted way, sitting at his desk, having given him only a rapid glance as he entered with his man.

"Very well, thank you, save a slight tickling in my throat and an uncomfortable feeling about my heart," replied the man-catching lawyer.

Turning slightly in his chair, Acee said absently: "Sit down; ah, sit down! Oh, is that you, Skelton? Excuse me, I was very busy. Have a seat. How are you?"

"Mr. Acee, I have explained to Mr. Skelton the business I casually mentioned to you some time ago," said Smith, "and he has agreed that I shall take the case and give him,—without risk of loss to him of any kind,—one-fourth of the amount that shall be realized. Will you kindly give me a sheet of paper to draw the agreement? And will you witness it?"

"Certainly; there it is. You may use that other desk. I am really so busy that you must excuse me. But go ahead with your business. It will not interrupt me at all."

So the contract was drawn, and duly signed and witnessed.

Jacob was then told of the main points of his claim.

"Now we come to another point, Jacob; as I have told you, the records do not show that you ever made the deed in question to your

father, and he is now dead. If such deed cannot be produced, then the property is yours. It was at the time of the sale of little value. It was merely an old field, with an extensive deposit of floury, white earth showing at one point in it. Your father sold it for a mere song compared with its present worth. But the Eureka Kaoline Company has developed it. That company has put up, as you know, fine works. It was capitalized for one hundred thousand dollars and the company has been paying from twenty to twenty-five per cent annual dividends for several years. The important point is this: If you will swear that your father never made payment to you of the consideration as referred to in his deed to the Kaoline Company, that you never gave him a deed to the property for the reason that he would not make the other deed and delivery to you, and would not pay you the cash difference named, then this very property of the Eureka Company will come back to you by law."

"Certainly! I can swear to that; it's the God's truth, and I will swear to that point-blank and flat-footed. But how about this? My father was very sick at the time, and he thought that as I was his only heir it was not necessary for us to pass deeds. He knew that I would inherit all his property anyhow, and so the deed simply went by default. The whole

business was dallying along for a long time and I suppose the company's lawyer overlooked the fact that I had not passed the deed to my father."

"Well, that is about the size of it, Jacob, I suppose," said Mr. Smith.

"My father was one of the best men God ever made," continued the sot, "and I hate to go back on what he did, since I got all his property anyway. No, I can't swear. He was my father."

"Hah! hah! hah!" laughed the busy lawyer from his desk. "Smith, you have a client this time who is purer than the law and all of its justice? You have a man who, although poor by reason of having been systematically robbed for years, still refuses to take from a bloated corporation what the law declares is his. You are right, Jacob; if you had all this valuable property you'd soon spend it anyway."

The man hung his head and gazed blankly at the floor for a few moments, then replied:

"No; I'm naked. I'm hungry. I'm dry. I'm no better than a dog so far as this world's goods are concerned. If the law says the property is mine, why then it is mine. I'm no better that the laws we are all forced to live under. I didn't make the laws; but all the same I have to live under them. The law hasn't stopped the thieves from robbing me of all I had, and

I suppose it is now just to deal out to me in this case my regular turn of good. When you want evidence let me know the time and the kind."

So saying, Skelton withdrew, leaving a stale odor of "pine-top" liquor in the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

"FATHER," announced Mary at the breakfast table, "I am going to church to-day; will you go with me?"

"No; I thank you, Mary,—I'm afraid not. My man from the Granville farm will be here about midday, and I wish to hear how things are going on there. I haven't had any report from him for two months. Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Gilgal meeting house; to-day is the third Sunday of the month,—preaching day there."

"Then you will be back by two o'clock. You should order dinner to be ready at that hour."

"I will, sir."

Gilgal was one of those old-time plain frame edifices,—so commonly seen throughout the southern Virginia country,—as lonesome-looking as a castaway skull on the commons. Situated in the midst of a large scrub-oak grove, it was almost overcrowded by scattering chinquapin bushes and soughing pines, hedging it

like a decorative fringe. A public burial-ground, unenclosed, lay neglected in the rear and on one side. In the grove were several sawed-log stepping blocks; and nearby was a spring, clear and cool, of the lightest free-stone water, trickling from the side of the white sand hills. Thither a well-worn path-way led through the thickly spreading shade; and almost every tree in the grove served as a tying-post for the many horses, mules, and oxen of the worshipers from far and near. Services were held at this church once a month; and large crowds congregated for spiritual and social communion. Indeed, preaching day was quite an event in the neighborhood. The op-portunity to meet people and learn the news, to see what kind of new clothes they had, and to exchange anecdotes,—all these attractions helped to break the monotony of every-day life. The men all went to one side of the church and the women to the other; just why has never been explained.

After the services the congregation lingered a while.

Seeing Mary Melton, Colonel Maclin sought her immediately after the services. She seemed greatly pleased that he should pay her this mark of his consideration; for her abrupt breaking off with Stuart years before was uppermost in her mind at the moment.

"I felt the spirit move me, Mary," said the Colonel. "I simply had to come and talk with you for a moment."

"And I am delighted, sir, that you have come. I have missed the old-time words of friendliness and good cheer that you always had for me."

"Ah, Mary, friends should never let anything come between them," replied the Colonel. "To me you will always be Stuart's inseparable little playmate, who used to romp with him on the lawns at Staunton Hill, and——"

As if she had not noticed that he was still speaking Mary quietly interrupted:

"Colonel, the next time you write to Stuart will you give him a message for me? Please tell him that I am still his friend."

"Why, child, of course I will tell him, with pleasure."

"Good-bye, Colonel!" Mary Melton offered her hand through the door of the carriage.

"God bless you, Mary!" The Colonel held her hand close at parting.

The old negro driver drew up the lines; and, at the word, the restless horses were instantly off toward Broadcastle.

Absorbed in the subject of the conversation with Mary Melton, Colonel Maclin mounted his horse. Indeed, so deeply engrossed was he that he seemed scarcely conscious of the

friendly salutes of acquaintances who passed him at a livelier gait.

"I wish this message would make Stuart change his plans," he thought.

CHAPTER XXIV

LAWYER ACEE, having come to the conclusion that his reputation would continue to command cases for him and that his already munificent income would steadily increase, resolved to change his mode of living. A pair of fast-stepping, well-matched horses caught his fancy, and he decided to possess them, if he could get them at a reasonable price. With but little bargaining the horses became his. Next he bought a buggy and a hand-made set of silver-mounted harness.

"This 'turnout' will attract the attention of the public to me," he said to himself. "It will aid me in gaining a position of more importance in the community and so bring me new clients. But, better still, it will serve me well in my business at Broadcastle, where the 'grand-prize' remains, suspended in the balance,—'twixt love and liberty. Oh, she'll come around all right in time, though."

After a month Mr. Acee felt satisfied that he had "picked up a bargain" in the horses. His next idea was to purchase a young negro

man of intelligence,—one who would be in every respect trustworthy. So he bought a boy named Joshua Fenton.

Josh turned out to be a treasure for his new master,—thoughtful, attentive, polite, energetic, truthful, and honest. Within a short time he had a complete wardrobe of his master's cast-off clothes, and every garment fitted as if made to measure by a tailor. When he put on a suit that looked shabby on his master, it made him look like a dandy.

"Josh," commanded Mr. Acee, "immediately after dinner to-day, take the horses and buggy and drive over to Petersburg. Put up at Jarrett's Hotel to-night. I will go over there on this afternoon's train, and will stop at Jarrett's, where I'll meet you. Early to-morrow morning have the team at the door,—at about five-thirty. We shall take the plank road and will not arrive at our destination before the late afternoon to-morrow. Now listen: Drive slowly and carefully; rub your horses dry, on arrival; feed them not too heavily to-night; see that they are properly cooled and watered before feeding. Do you understand all the instructions, and will you remember?"

"Yes, sir; I'll do my best, sir."

The following morning at four o'clock Josh went to the stable, watered and fed the horses, rubbed them until their coats fairly shone, and

at five-thirty had the team at the door of Jarrett's awaiting his master's orders. As soon as Acee arrived they set out for Broadcastle.

All conditions, including weather, seemed so propitious for his visit to Mary Melton's home that Acee felt a sense of certainty. The smooth plank road was favorable for smooth and rapid driving, and he reached Broadcastle at seven o'clock that night.

Soon after Mary and Mr. Acee had settled themselves in the parlor for an undisturbed talk, as he hoped, a colored girl came to the door, and shyly beckoned to her young mistress, who excused herself and left the room.

As the hostess remained away longer than was agreeable to Mr. Acee he paced impatiently from one window to the other and back again, his mind deeply absorbed in the object of his visit.

At length Mary re-entered, laughing.

Her laughter was merry to the point of infectiousness.

"What in the world is it?" inquired the lawyer, falling into the humor of his fair hostess.

"Why, your man Joshua has proposed to my maid Mandy," she replied.

"Well, I'll declare, upon my soul!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Doesn't he beat the record? I must lecture Josh."

"No; no, indeed! Do nothing of the kind, please. It seems to be a case of love at first sight. Mandy has fallen desparately in love with Josh, for she said to me, with tears in her eyes: 'That there Richmond man, miss, said something to me that hurt my feelings.' 'What did he say?' I asked. 'He came up, 'longside of me, miss, and he took hold of my han',—kinder easy like,—an' he say: "Mandy, you's de pizenest pretty gal I's seen since de woods was burnt, Mandy; an' I loves you harder 'an cider, I does. Don't you reckon your mistiss will let you marry me?" and all the like of that.' 'And what did you tell him?' I asked. 'I never told him nuthin', miss,—'cause I couldn't, without askin' you 'bout it.' Her eyes swam in tears as she told me of the affair. Oh, it is simply too serious to laugh over, but I can't help it."

The lawyer said gravely: "I fear this affair is too spontaneous to last. Give them time! Let them think over matters for awhile; maybe they have fallen in love, sure enough. We'll see. If it is a real case of love, I'm in favor of seeing it through to a satisfactory dénouement."

The far-seeing lawyer recognized the suitability of the match in the event of Mary Melton's marrying him, for their marriage would bring the two slaves to one ownership.

CHAPTER XXV

THERE are those living in Clarksville this day who well remember how lovely Mary Melton looked on a certain August morning when with Mr. Acee she passed through the little town behind his dashing team of bays.

As soon as they passed out of the town the lawyer commenced the laying down of the premises of a serious argument in his all-important case.

"You haven't appeared at all interested in my law practice," he complained to his fair companion.

"No; how is it progressing?"

"Brilliantly! I'm now getting about all the business I can take care of. The cases might be larger, however, and so might pay better, but I'm busy all the time. I won a case last month that will pay me, well,—something like twenty-five thousand dollars."

"My! that is good! very good, Mr. Acee."

"It was taken on contingency. Those cases pay best these times, when the lawyer is smart

enough to judge when the case may be won. This was a plain case, involving a defect in title to a large acreage of valuable property. The last purchasers had spent quite a large sum in developing it; they lost all; it came back to the original owner, under the recent decision of the court, and through my instrumentality as his legal representative. I'm now established in my profession, and with an income that makes me independent. I have made this trip to Broadcastle solely to ask you to become my wife, for, as you know, I have loved you since I first saw you."

"Then yours was also a case of love at first sight," she said, looking at him quizzically out of the corners of her eyes; and he knew her "also" referred to Josh and Mandy.

"Yes, if so you will have it; but whether first or not, it is love now and forever. If you will but trust me,—believe in me,—we could be so happy. I would spend all the rest of my life in trying to make you happy. I would work day and night. I would love you deeply always. Now, will you? That's the question." He paused as if waiting for an answer.

"I wish you would not ask that question."

"But I do ask the question, and I expect an answer. Don't you recall what you promised me years ago, on the lawn at Broadcastle?"

"I recall every word of that, Mr. Acee," she

slowly replied, without looking at him. "You may think me sentimental, but my marriage must be based on love."

"The idea that love is requisite is purely an Americanism," he replied emphatically. "A woman learns to love after marriage,—after she learns that her husband is worthy of her love, after he proves himself. You will never be able to judge a man until you know him intimately. When the woman allows some little quality of the man to loom up large in her eye and loses sight of his general average she may learn to love him for that single quality; afterward she may learn to her sorrow that she was foolish in allowing so trifling an attraction to mislead her. There must be all-around good balance in the man; and reason is more to be depended on than caprice, when making your selection. Be reasonable! Be your sensible self! Say the word now,—the word that will make me a very happy man." He looked at her sharply as if waiting for her answer.

"Mr. Acee, I can't, I don't, love you."

"Then you must love someone else?"

Mary Melton made no reply, and they drove on in silence.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was dusk. Mr. Melton and his heart's delight sat on the porch at Broadcastle. The whip-poor-will was calling his lonesome "widow," and twilight was spreading a veil over nature's wondrous realm.

The old gentleman turned to the girl. "My daughter," said he, in an earnest voice, "I am greatly concerned about your happiness,—about what will become of you when I am gone."

"Why, Father?" Rising and putting her chair closer to his side, she took his hand caressingly between her warm, soft palms.

"Well, according to the law of life, I must soon pay my debt to Nature. At any moment I may go, even ahead of time; for life is not a scheduled train; the Great Conductor runs is as seems best to Him. If the tired passenger is ready for the journey's end, what matters when it comes. I want to see things here in order before I go."

"You are despondent, Father! Why, you

are quite well, you know." Her words were full of tenderness.

"I? Yes; but you; how about you, my child?"

"Why, I'm not afraid to die, Father."

"But it is not for your after life that I feel concern, my child; but your life here in this world,—that is a different matter. With neither father, nor brother, nor any sort of protector, your future seems so uncertain."

"But, Father, I'm not worried about the future."

There was silence for a while; then Mr. Melton said:

"Mary, I must speak plainly to you, my child. I had hoped you and Kirkman Acee might marry, if you cared enough for each other."

"But I do not love him, Father, and have told him so plainly. But he argues that love will come after marriage. What do you think of that, Father? You are experienced,—you understand human nature."

"Wait, wait, my child, until you meet the man you love. I like Mr. Acee; I approve of him, but I wouldn't have my daughter marry any man unless she loved him."

"I love you, Father. Unless I could find somebody just like you I would rather stay single all my life. I can't explain it, Father,

but there is something about Mr. Acee that is almost repulsive to me. Besides, there is Dean. Should you be taken, I would go to him. I owe it to him to be near him, where I could attend his wants and watch over him and love him with all my heart."

"But that would not mean happiness, dear. And I like to think of you with an assured future, with some one to love you and to shield you,—not for you to have to be the protector."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE work done by Dr. Stuart Maclin at the New York Casualty Hospital was so notable that not only did reports of his original operations appear in *The Medical Monthly,* but he became the subject of editorials, and accounts of his skill appeared even in the daily papers.

Someone sent Colonel Maclin the copy of a newspaper containing a marked article. The old gentleman read it with tears in his eyes, and immediately betook himself to his old friend in the training stables.

"Abram," he said, holding the paper in his hand, " here is a report from New York on the work being done there by Stuart. I'll read it to you. He is building up a great name for himself and for us."

"Thank de Lord!" exclaimed the old slave; "thank de Lord!" he repeated. "Marster, read it, please, sir. I wants to hear evvy word of it."

The Colonel read the article aloud.

"Yes, Lord! jus' what I 'spected. I knowed

he'd do sumfen like dat,—I knowed it; an' sho' nuff he is. Thank de Lord!"

"Now, Abram, I'm going to New York to see Stuart. Take care of your horses. And you'd better stop all that coon-hunting at night. You are getting too old to do what you used to do,—and the dews are very heavy this time of the year. You come in wet and tired late at night and you lie down and go to sleep with your clothes on. You'll be having fever or a congestive chill the first thing you know. You'd better quit that coon-hunting at night so much." The Colonel knew it was Abram's special amusement, and on second thought concluded it would be requiring too much of him to deny him that sport altogether, so he had added his amendment "so much."

"Yes, sir, Marster; I'll kinder call a halt on it, sir,—so much,—'case I wants to live long er nuff to see my young Marster ag'in; an' I wants to see him wid my veay eyes. Marster, ax 'im to come back wid you! Please, sir. I sho' wants to see 'im. Tell 'im, please sir, dat I axed you to tell 'im to come. I know 'e wants to see me, too. 'Case he's bound to keer for me for de sake of ole times an' Liza."

"I'll tell him, Abram. But I'm afraid he is too busy to leave his work in New York."

"I only wish I could stay longer, but affairs

at home are urgent," said Colonel Maclin in reply to his son's request for him to remain longer in New York. "Stuart, let me suggest that you go back with me. I am in earnest. Don't refuse to go! This may be the last request I may ever make of you."

"But, really, it is almost impossible for me to leave here, sir."

"Think, too, how gratified Abram will be to see you. He says that it is his one hope to see you again. I want you to go home with me, my son."

"I am sorry; but really I am too busy here, Father. Every day I have important operations to perform." He paused. "Let me see. Possibly I might be able to get some friend to substitute for me for a few days. I'll see. I would be so glad to see Staunton Hill again, —dear old place!—and Unc' Abram, too."

They found the carriage awaiting their arrival at the station, and Moses sat holding the pair of thoroughbreds,—a broad grin of delight on his face, at the sight of his "young Marster."

"I sho' is glad to see you, Marse Stuart," he said. "And Unc' Abram will be, too,—if he's livin' when we gits dar."

"Why,—what do you mean?" gasped Stuart, while Colonel Maclin opened his eyes wide and

threw up one hand involuntarily, as if to ward off a blow.

"He had a mighty hard chill night-'fo'-las', sir. Mr. Pless thought 'e mought die, so 'e sent off for de doctor. He say if Unc' Abram gits anur chill like dat he'll sho' die."

"Hurry, Moses," said the Colonel. "If Abram is that sick we haven't a minute to lose."

When they reached Staunton Hill one of the servants came running to open the gate.

"How is Unc' Abram?" Stuart called.

"He's havin' anur chill, sir. He's been had it 'bout er hour, sir."

Grasping his medicine case, Stuart hastened to Unc' Abram's cabin.

The old man was lying on the bed, with all the covering he possessed drawn over him,—over head and all; the bed was shaking from his rigors. Drawing the cover gently from the sick man's head, Stuart said cheerfully:

"Well, Unc' Abram, I'm here!"

The old slave breathed a deep sigh. Then groaning, he slowly and tremulously rose on his elbow, and at length sat up in his bed, exclaiming as he held out his arms to Stuart:

"Lord! Lord, be praised! Death an' joy bofe come together! Young Marster,—*my* boy!"

Stuart returned his greeting, leaning his body over to the old man, and they embraced each other fondly.

Stuart supported the old man in his unsteady efforts to return to the pillow; he pulled the cover closely over him, while Abram shook and groaned from cold and nervousness. Too unstrung to speak connectedly, he uttered one or two words with each short breath.

"Where's Marster?" he asked.

"He'll be here in a few minutes, Unc' Abram," replied Stuart, as he dropped chloroform in a spoon to administer to him.

After a few moments the old man exclaimed with trembling voice:

"Marster! Marster! Sen' for 'im, please, my boy! Oh, sen' for 'im!"

Stuart went to the door and, seeing that his father was then near the cabin, he returned to the patient.

Colonel Maclin entered the cabin quickly, and looking anxiously at Stuart asked, "How is he?"

Stuart made no reply, but his father understood as he met his troubled gaze. It was the final pitiful scene of a faithful life's drama,—the helpless, suffering old slave recognized his call to one of those "high-up worlds, somewhere, somehow, for human souls," that had been his belief through all the years.

"Marster! Marster!" called the old man in trembling accents.

"Here I am, Abram," going to him.

The old slave slowly lifted his now tense arm toward his master, and motioned him to come nearer.

"Come a lil'—lil' bit closer, please, sir; I's n-near g-gone. Lor-d, ha-ave merc-y!"

The Colonel leaned over the body of the suffering old man.

"I can't go, Marster,—wid—widout a-tellin' you all," he muttered, his jaws half clinched.

"Speak, Abram! I want to hear every word you have to say!"

There seemed to be now some change for the better in his condition.

"Befo' I goes, sir, I's bound to tell you all. Folks 'ill say ole Abram was a ole rascal when dey knows all; but I don't keer 'bout dat. I knowed dat gam'ler-thief, Benson, had done got you in a hole to steal all yo' money; an' I just stopped 'im,—dat's all. Marster, while she was a-mumblin' over my han' through de stable cracks, and knowed me,—I killed Nellie."

"What!" exclaimed the Colonel, shocked at the suddenness of the confession. "You? You, Abram?" he inquired, doubt and surprise mastering him.

"Yes, sir. I loved 'er, an' I been seein' of

'er mos' evvy night since. She comes down de road, an' comes an' pokes 'er haid in at dat winder dar by my bed, an' mumbles over my han'—jus' de same as she done all de time; an' look, Marster! See her? Dar she come; she got a new bridle an' a white, clean cloth an' a new shiny saddle; she's a-mumblin' of my han'—an' a-talkin',—jus' de same as she used to all de time. De horn is a-blowin' for de race; dey's a-callin' of you, Nellie! Ain't you gwine? *Go on* to de pos'! Nellie, dey's a-callin', I tells you! Don't you hear 'em a-callin'—callin'?"

As the old man's last words trailed off into an inaudible whisper Stuart, who stood on the opposite side of the bed with his hand on the patient's pulse, looked up at his father, and said chokingly, shaking his head slowly:

"The last race has been run. It is all over now."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AFTER the solemn services had been held over the remains of the faithful old slave, and after his body had been laid to rest on the eastern slope of the lawn at Staunton Hill, overlooking the training stables and the gently flowing Staunton, the young master felt that his visit to his old home was over. He spent an entire day roaming about the grounds and buildings, where at nearly every spot some boyhood memory of sport or adventure arose to meet him. Three days later he said good-bye to his father and returned to New York. Within ten days he was to sail for South America, and he awaited the hour with impatience.

The atmosphere of Broadcastle continued dreary. Mr. Melton had aged greatly and Mary was fast becoming a staid woman under the shadow of her quiet surroundings.

At last, however, a ray of hope entered the home. Mr. Melton received a letter which he read and then handed to Mary, saying:

"This may gladden you, my child. Such letters, however, fail to cheer me. I have given up all hope."

"Dear Mr. Melton: I have determined to secure the aid and advice of an eminent surgeon here, in whose ability I feel the greatest confidence. He has consented to study your son's case, and I trust that we together may be able to help him. Should any changes of importance develop at any time I will advise you promptly. I hope to be able to give you more encouragement within the next few weeks.

"With assurances of my esteem, and desiring to be remembered kindly to your daughter, believe me, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"E. O. Bache."

"Why, Father," said Mary, her voice bright with hopefulness, "this is good news! We shall now have another chance to have Dean restored or, at any rate, relieved. Dr. Bache would not have called to his assistance a man of ordinary ability. The doctor evidently hopes for a cure, so why should not we, Father? Yes, I shall keep,—I shall cling to,—my hope!"

"We shall see. But I have reached the point where I despair."

"But I can't help feeling encouraged, Father, when Dr. Bache shows that he has confidence enough in this specialist to call on him for advice and assistance. Why, it's a blessed thought!" Mary looked brightly at her father, but the old gentleman made no reply. Picking up a newspaper he began to read it; then, putting it down he suddenly said:

"I must go to Richmond to-morrow morning. I have important business there. Do you want to go with me, Mary?"

"Thank you, no, Father. Mr. Acee said he would be here some time this week."

"Well, I suppose you can't go, then. But send for Mrs. Taliaferro to stay with you while I am gone."

"I'll send Moses right over and ask her to come."

The old gentleman again raised his newspaper and continued reading. But quickly he lowered it again, another idea occurring to him, and he asked:

"Are you going to give Acee an answer this time?"

"Oh, Father, he is probably just coming to pay us a friendly visit,—nothing more."

Mr. Melton began to read again and Mary soon left the room.

After reading awhile he turned to his desk and busied himself in searching for papers and memoranda connected with the business that was taking him to Richmond. At length he came across the old memorandum book that had been Dean's,—the one that Stuart had given to him at the White Sulphur Springs that summer's morning so long ago.

"Ah," said he to himself, "I remember. It is Dean's. I'll put it in my pocket and read it

on the trip to-morrow. It will remind me of him. If I get myself worked up over that now, I'm afraid I would forget one-half of my important papers." He put the little book in his pocket, and continued his search. And thus he remained engaged until it became too dark for work, when he arose and walked the long hall and porches, back and forth; counting the trips until he had taken the two miles of exercise necessary for his health.

At ten o'clock Mary came into the room to kiss her father good-night and good-bye, and to wish him a pleasant journey and a safe return.

CHAPTER XXIX

ON the train Mr. Melton took from his pocket Dean's memorandum book. In glancing over it, years before, he had been hasty and had concluded that the notes were merely of trivial matters,—of petty cash, wash lists, or notes his son had made for his college examinations. Never until now had Mr. Melton carefully examined the entries, of which there were many, filled with original thoughts and criticisms on books and persons,—all of keen interest to the devoted father. Each paragraph reminded him of his boy, once so full of life and health and hope. At length,—it was, in fact, the very last entry,—he read something that startled him. Immediately the old gentleman showed unusual agitation. He jumped up from his seat and started to go for water at the far end of the coach, but suddenly he changed his mind and returned to his seat to read the writing again.

"Well! well! well!" said he to himself, half aloud, "this is astounding. I should have read it years ago. So careless in me to be guilty of

such an oversight! The memorandum clears a point of the greatest importance. And to think that I should have been so negligent!"

Again and again he read the memorandum, always talking to himself in an undertone.

"Evidently Dean collapsed before completing the note," he said to himself.

The old gentleman grew more and more nervous; he paced the aisle of the coach,—back and forth, back and forth,—until he attracted the notice of all the other passengers. His face showed such deep emotion that it was apparent even to the strangers that he was in trouble. It seemed to him that the train would never reach Richmond. When it did arrive it was so late in the afternoon that no business could be transacted on that day. Mr. Melton had one besetting idea. He was determined to see Mr. Acee on the following day.

"It is extremely puzzling to me," he muttered to himself. "I'll see what he has to say about this matter."

At ten o'clock the following morning there was an important board meeting at one of the banks. Mr. Melton, as a director, had to attend. After its adjournment, at twelve o'clock, he hurried to the young lawyer's office. The door was locked and a placard stated that Mr. Acee would be out of the city until the following Monday night.

"That's unfortunate, but he has probably gone to Broadcastle. Mary said she was expecting him. Pity there isn't an earlier train from Richmond. I can't leave here before to-morrow morning."

Mr. Acee, it would appear, had begun to play an important rôle in the drama of the old gentleman's life. Mr. Melton spent the remainder of the day in making enquiries about the young lawyer. Only closest friends were consulted, and then cautiously. He inquired as to Mr. Acee's standing as a man and as a lawyer. Two of his friends, both lawyers at the Richmond bar, gave flattering accounts of the young man's ability; one predicted that he would reach the top of the ladder; the other said his success was phenomenal. From another old friend, not of the legal profession, he learned of him socially and otherwise.

Having finished his business in the city, Mr. Melton caught the train the following morning, in the hope of reaching home by six-thirty in the afternoon.

Mr. Acee had arrived at Broadcastle at five o'clock that afternoon, having come with his fine horses, driven by Josh.

"How pretty you look, Miss Mary," were his first words as he took a chair near her in the drawing room. "Never have I seen you

look so charming. Why, you bewilder me! Your color,—your eyes,—and all look as if your mind were at peace with all the world! The sight of you is positively exhilarating to a fellow worn out with work and responsibilities. What has caused this improvement?"

"I am glad you find my personal appearance satisfactory," she said tauntingly, then excused herself to attend to some household matters.

When she came back her face was beaming with amusement.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

"As it is a matter in which you are as much interested as I am, perhaps I ought to tell you. Mandy has just said to me: 'Miss May, that there Josh been hurtin' my feelin's ag'in. He say he ain't hardly been able to eat nothin', nor to sleep, for thinkin' of me since he lef' here. He's a pow'ful earnes' nigger, too. He mean evvy word of it. He say he loves me, an' he ain't never goin' to res' till he gits me.' "

"I hope you gave her good advice."

"I told her that he had no right to say anything to her on that subject without the consent of her mistress and his master."

"And what did she say?"

"She didn't answer, but there were tears in her eyes. So I said, 'Mandy, have you fallen in love?' and she replied, 'Miss May, I'll tell

you the truth, if I dies for it, I'll tell you! I's fell—I's fell in his arms. But I jus' couldn't he'p it,—he talk *so* pretty!' "

"Miss Mary, what I cannot understand is how that ignorant Josh has outstripped the learned lawyer in the art of winning the girl he loves. Tell me—you know that I love you—tell me now whether it will be worth while for me to nurse even a forlorn hope—that you may learn to—"

"Oh, there is Father! please excuse me," she interrupted, jumping up and going to meet Mr. Melton with a kiss, as he stood in the doorway, silent, threatening, with anger depicted on his usually placid face.

As soon as he had returned his daughter's kiss he gently pushed her aside, and not seeming to see Mr. Acee's proffered hand he said, looking that young man full in the face: "There is no welcome for such as you in this house, sir!"

"Oh, Father!" exclaimed Mary, grasping his arm, which remained extended, the finger pointing straight toward Kirkman Acee.

"Yes, I mean it,—every word of it, and when y——"

"Please explain, Mr. Melton!" interrupted Acee, as he stood back, as if dumbfounded at the suddenness and fierceness of the attack.

"You have played your friends false,"

angrily charged the old gentleman. "You knew that Stuart Maclin was asleep,—that his eyes were closed,—when he committed that nearly mortal attack on Dean."

"Indeed, sir, I did not. I am innocent of any perversion of the truth." Acee spoke gamely enough. Virtuous indignation seemed to burn in his words.

"Then you are more truthful than Stuart; you are more honest than the injured man himself, who has testified, believing himself to be dying. Read that, Mary—read it aloud! It is the voluntary testimony of your brother, written in his own hand."

He handed her the memorandum book, out of which she read aloud:

" 'Stuart was asleep when he stabbed me. I think I am dying—deal kindly with St——' "

The syllables came rapidly over the girl's trembling lips, but as she uttered the last word her voice broke, the tears streamed from her eyes, and she was sobbing unrestrainedly as she leaned upon her father's shoulder.

"This, sir, condemns you," thundered Mr. Melton. "You have betrayed your friend Stuart Maclin; you have deceived me."

"And me," cried Mary, without looking up—the sobs still choking her.

"I believed as Dean did at first," replied Acee, "but on second thought I was convinced

that I was wrong. What did Stuart mean by saying, 'All his wealth is mine,' unless he intended to marry your daughter and inherit all your property?"

"Hush, sir. Not only would you betray your friend by false testimony, but you now seek to justify your treachery by specious argument. The explanation of the words is clear in view of Stuart's dream."

"But, my dear sir!" Acee was ready to continue the battle.

"Stop, sir, stop! Make no further show of your duplicity! Your scheme is now perfectly manifest."

"But I wanted to say that——"

"Stop, I say! I have other information of you. From my friend, Mr. Paynter Smith, father of Mr. T. Wylie Smith, the young lawyer, I have learned how you spent your time at the Clerk's office in Richmond searching the old musty records, overhauling old settlements, deeds, and records, until you found the flaw in the Kaoline property title; how you induced Smith to assume charge of the case in order to conceal your connection with it; how you took a letter in his own handwriting, a copy of a letter you had written with your own hand,—promising to give you one-half of the profit of the case in return for your advice; how you suggested to Smith to find Skelton,

the legal claimant of the case, when he was just barely sober enough to talk, and to bring him to your office; how you cunningly persuaded him to perjure himself and to demand back the property from the Eureka Kaoline Company, although that Company had paid the full purchase price to Skelton's father, whose entire estate young Skelton shortly afterward inherited. You and Smith have won the case, it is true, and have divided three-fourths of the amount of the judgment between you. I owned more than half of the stock of that Company, else probably I should never have heard of your disreputable business methods in the matter. I have nothing but contempt for you. I want no explanations,—no words of defense. Go back to your deceived friends in Richmond, or elsewhere,—anywhere, it matters not to me,—so I may know you are gone. Go as quickly as possible from the shelter of this roof that has always been hospitable to the honest and the upright. I will order your horses at once, sir. Come, Mary! Come with me!" and he led his daughter from the room.

Within ten minutes the lawyer drove away from Broadcastle, with his face turned toward the setting sun.

CHAPTER XXX

HARDLY had the lawyer passed beyond the boundary line of the estate before reaction began in the highly wrought mind of the Master of Broadcastle. As he sat at his desk nervously filing away the business papers he had brought from Richmond suddenly he collapsed,—a stroke of paralysis.

He was helpless when Mary found him, and it seemed to her like years before the doctor came.

The old gentleman grew worse. In a short while he lay unconscious, and the third day after the attack he passed away.

For days and even weeks after Mr. Melton had been laid in the old family burial ground confusion and sorrow reigned at Broadcastle. Mary now realized the full import of her father's solicitude for her in her loneliness.

"What is the matter with you, Mandy?" Mary asked. "You are crying all the time."

"Miss May, I'm so 'stressed. They says trouble always has a partner."

"What in the world do you mean, Mandy?"

"Josh ain't no mo' an' got out er de yard 'fo' Marster gits sick an' goes, too."

"Oh, you're grieving for Josh? Never mind, I'll see what I can do about it."

"Thanky, Miss May! the Lord will bless you for your kindness," and the negro girl's face beamed with pleasure.

"Bring me my small desk, Mandy! I'll write about that at once."

The small rosewood desk, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, was laid on her lap, and Mary wrote the following letter to her lawyer, Mr. Bronson:

"Dear Sir: Please communicate with Mr. Kirkman Acee, Attorney at Law, Richmond, Va., and propose to purchase for me his man Josh. There has sprung up a strong attachment between my maid and this man Josh, and you are authorized to purchase him for me at any price in reason. He is worth six hundred to seven hundred dollars; but, if necessary, I will pay twice his value. Please give this your prompt attention, and advise me of the outcome.

"Respectfully,

"Mary Melton."

She read the letter to Mandy.

"Thank you, Miss May," she said with pathetic gratitude. "The Lord will bless you."

In due course of time a letter came from Mr. Bronson informing Mary that Acee declined to sell his man Josh. He would not permit his valued body servant to fall into other hands at any price.

Mary kept this knowledge from her maid.

"It would grieve her so!" she thought. "I'll try some other plan. I will yet bring it about."

Several days passed, yet Mary had come to no determination regarding Josh. The death of her father had been so sudden,—the shock so great,—that her mind seemed to have lost all power to think connectedly.

She dispatched a messenger with a note to Mr. Bronson asking him to come to her at once.

When at noon the boy brought the mail there was a letter from Dr. Bache addressed to her father. With her heart contracted with pain, she read:

"DEAR SIR: We have decided that an operation may relieve your son. We would like to operate as soon as possible. It is our opinion that there is a pressure on his brain, caused by a fracture. This may be proved by an exploratory operation; and if our diagnosis is correct there is no doubt that we shall be able to cure the patient. Have we your consent to proceed? We are satisfied that this is the course to pursue. Awaiting your reply, I have the honor to remain,

"Your obedient servant,

"E. O. BACHE."

"Thank God," exclaimed Mary, her heart suddenly lighter than she had believed it could ever be again. "I'll go to him at once."

Later in the afternoon Mr. Bronson arrived.

"Mr. Bronson," said Mary in her direct way, "I want Josh and Mandy to marry each other. My idea is to have you go to Richmond and

arrange the matter. See Mr. Acee and propose some settlement that will bring about the marriage. If Mr. Acee will consent for Josh to marry Mandy, I want you to take steps at once to give her her freedom. She should be free to work for herself. She may in time save enough to buy her husband; then he, too, will be free. Now I leave this in your hands. You know best how to do it."

"Miss Mary, I will do everything in my power."

Before she went to rest that night Mary sat long in deep thought, full of regret that Stuart had left the United States. She did not even know his address in Brazil, but she had heard that he had gone to the headwaters of the Amazon River. His father might know the address, but as he was not at home, she hardly knew what steps to take to write him some word of explanation for the apparently harsh and neglectful treatment she had been compelled to show him in deference to her father's wishes. At length she decided to write to Stuart, enclosing her letter in a note to the Colonel, asking him to forward it.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN a far corner of the reception room of the sanitarium, heavily veiled in black, was a little woman, silent and demure. So still she sat that she might have been taken for some dark draped statue. For an hour she posed there, transfixed by the trying ordeal of the hour. Her veil of somber crêpe, completely enveloping her, seemed to typify the future as it looked to her,—dark,—colorless,—hopeless. This motionless pose was but the tense antithesis of her throbbing heart and brain; for there the blood flushed rapidly, under the stimulating excitement of the moment. The operation on Dean was being performed. Thoughtfully she gazed through the smothering crêpe; quicker beat her pulse with every approaching footstep in the outer hall. On the outcome of that hour hung all her hope of all the happiness of all the future years. How tense the feelings of the lonely woman! She gazed and feared that in the next brief moment she might hear the words that would leave her without one relative in all the world.

That woman was Mary Melton. She had arrived early in the morning, and after con-

ferring with Dr. Bache concerning Dean's case she had authorized him to operate on her brother at once.

Mary heard footsteps and the cool voice of the surgeon, as he was approaching along the outer hallway. In the possession of that man was the knowledge that would bring to her either happiness or misery. Nearer he came; he was almost in the room.

"Merciful God!" she whispered, with eyes half closed in prayer, "have mercy on me!"

The surgeon entered. He looked around the room. On seeing Mary he smiled,—gladly, that she might the quicker see that all was well. Advancing to her briskly, he extended both his firm hands as she rose and grasped them with her own unsteady ones.

"All is well!" were his first words. "Your brother's trouble proved to be just what we thought. We have operated and there is every hope that he will entirely recover. You may well rejoice, for within a few weeks he will probably be as sound as he ever was in his life."

For a moment Mary's voice would not come; then she cried: "Oh, I thank you, doctor! I can never tell you how glad I am! I now have my dear brother brought back to life,—to consciousness. I can't tell you all I feel, but oh, I thank you, doctor!"

"No, do not thank me. Rather thank my able assistant, who deserves all the credit for discovering the cause and the location of your brother's trouble, after Dr. Gross and I had pronounced the patient incurable. I trusted my assistant to perform this operation rather than myself, for already he is a most skilful surgeon. There is a great career ahead of him."

Just then another man entered the room, and Dr. Bache exclaimed with pleasure in his voice: "Ah! here he is now," and, motioning to the new arrival, he went on: "This is Dr. Maclin, Miss Melton." Then he excused himself hurriedly, and left the room.

Mary threw back her veil and reached out both hands to Stuart; a deep crimson flush upon her cheeks told plainly of her emotion.

"You, Stuart? You, Stuart? Oh, thank God, thank God!" and she burst into tears.

Grasping her lithe form in his strong arms, he supported her as she leaned her head on his breast and sobbed her heart out.

The shock of the meeting together with the assured hope of her brother's recovery had for once in her life taken away her command of herself and had caused her to give uncontrolled expression to her long smothered feelings.

"My treasure! My love! My sweet, sweet girl! I, too, say thank God, Mary!—and God bless you."

His words thrilled with suppressed joy. He held her in his arms, he kissed her veil, for her head was bowed downward and her face was hidden on his breast.

When she raised her head, and looked up into his face,—blindly because of the tears that streamed from her eyes,—he kissed her forehead, her cheek, her mouth, until she ceased to cry. At length she said:

"Oh, Stuart, how thankful I am for your kindness of heart,—for your tenderness!"

"Now add 'for your love,' Mary! How happy I am to see your sweet face again, so full of mingled smiles and tears. How I remember our happiness that August night when you and I sat on the old stone steps and you promised to wait."

"That was the happiest moment of my girlhood, Stuart, as this is of my womanhood, for I know you love me now just as you did that night when you made me know your devotion, though you never once uttered the word 'love'."

"My little girl of the blue sun-bonnet, do not ask me if I am happy! This is the one happy hour I have lived in all these years, and I was beginning to feel so old." He led her to the sofa, where they sat, gazing into each other's eyes.

"You are not old, Stuart, but though you had grown as old as Methuselah, I should not

see it; for I shall always keep you young in my heart."

"Mary, we can soon return to Virginia, and take Dean with us. Together we will all go wading in Cremona branch, as we did as children; we'll seine for minnows until we tire of that; we'll fish awhile with bent pin hooks, and then build a dam of brush and mud, across the little stream, and make us a corn-stock water wheel."

"Stuart, may I see Dean to-day?" enquired Mary, the morning following the operation.

"It would be more prudent to wait a few days, my little girl," replied the surgeon in a gentle tone.

"Is he improving? Have you seen him to-day?" she asked.

"Yes, he is doing as well as we could possibly expect. He'll be well within a few weeks."

The lovers were sitting in the visitors' reception room of the sanitarium as they talked.

"When can I see him, the earliest moment?" she enquired. "I want to look into his face and see again that old-time light of affection. I want to tell him so much that is in my heart. No one, in this world, will ever know how I have suffered."

"You may see him, dear, within a week. He

is now doing too well to run the risk of exciting him and causing a relapse."

"Stuart, it seems almost impossible for me to realize that I'll have both you and Dean again. I thought after my dear father's death that I should be so utterly alone."

"You shall never be alone again, dear. I shall live for you hereafter."

There was a pause.

"Oh, let me take a measure, Mary!" Stuart said, suddenly taking her hand. He put her finger across a small rule that he had drawn from his pocket.

"Why, what in the world are you trying to do?" she laughed.

"I am taking your measure for a ring." There was a solemn note in his voice.

"What do you wish to give me a ring for?"

"Why, in exchange for your heart."

"You have always had that, Stuart."

CHAPTER XXXII

A LETTER from Mr. Bronson informed Mary that he had bought Josh, and that he had brought him back from Richmond to Broadcastle. The letter of explanation said in part:

"On my entrance into Mr. Acee's office I found him cold and haughty. After talking with him for a short time I perceived that he was disposed to sell the man Josh,—provided I offered enough money. 'How much?' I asked. 'Twelve hundred dollars,' he replied. 'Too much,' I answered. 'No,' said he, 'the man is well trained; he is not an ordinary cornfield negro; he is competent and is worth every cent of the price.' Whereupon I drew my check for the twelve hundred dollars, and told him it would be given to him when he produced Josh, provided Josh consented to the sale. Soon the man came into the office; he seemed pleased to become your property. The check was then delivered to Mr. Acee, and I brought Josh home, and sent him to Broadcastle."

After reading this letter from Bronson, Mary Melton wrote immediately, directing

that the marriage of Josh and Mandy should take place without delay. She gave explicit instructions as to how the affair should be celebrated with all due ceremony, and that a feast should be spread for all the slaves in honor of the occasion.

As soon as Dean was well enough to travel they all returned to Virginia.

Stuart found his father in high spirits,—delighted to get him back, but happy above all things at the prospect of having his son at home to comfort his old age. The Colonel congratulated Stuart on his professional success, but pronounced that as nothing compared with the blessing of having such a woman as Mary Melton as his wife.

A simple shaft of granite points upward on the far side of the lawn at Staunton Hill, marking the spot where rest the remains of those faithful slaves,—Abram and Eliza. For there were they buried,—distant from the house, but on a spot that commands a view of the training stables below. Colonel Maclin had the stone quarried from his own river hills by his own masons, and,—erected as a testimonial of love,—there the shaft stands to this day. By Stuart's order a fitting bronze tablet was attached to one side, commemorating the virtues of Mammy Liza; for Colonel Maclin had

omitted her name when he had these words inscribed to his faithful trainer:

TO THE SACRED MEMORY
OF
ABRAM
THIS SHAFT HAS BEEN ERECTED
BY ONE WHO,
THOUGH IN NAME HIS MASTER,
WAS EVER MORE HIS FRIEND.

Born a Slave,
He Liver a Slave,
And Died a Slave,—
to Duty.

1859.

END